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GOD'S SCOURGE
BY
MORETON HALL

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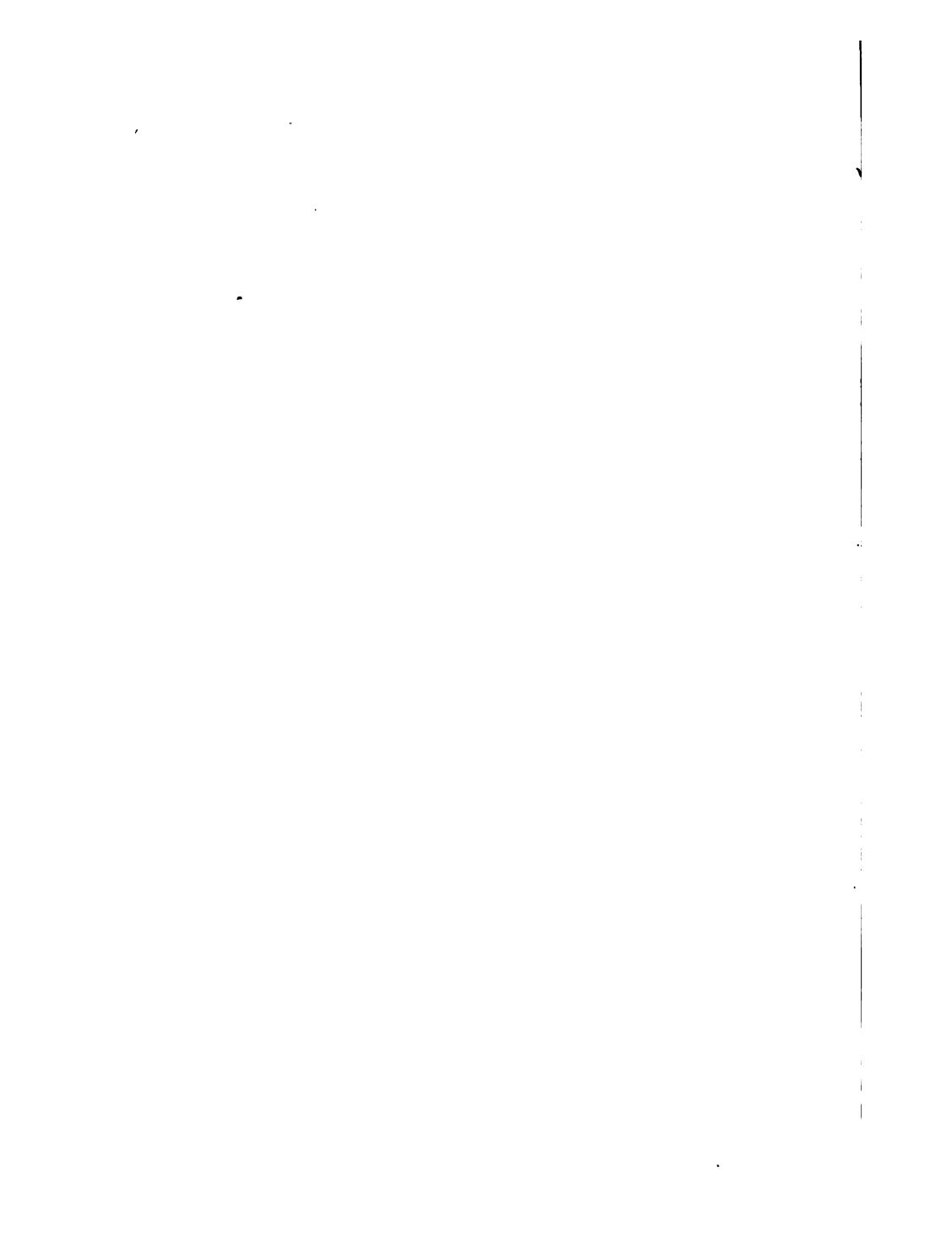
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GOD'S SCOURGE



GOD'S SCOURGE

***A DRAMA IN
FOUR ACTS***

By
MORETON HALL



**LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE. 1902**

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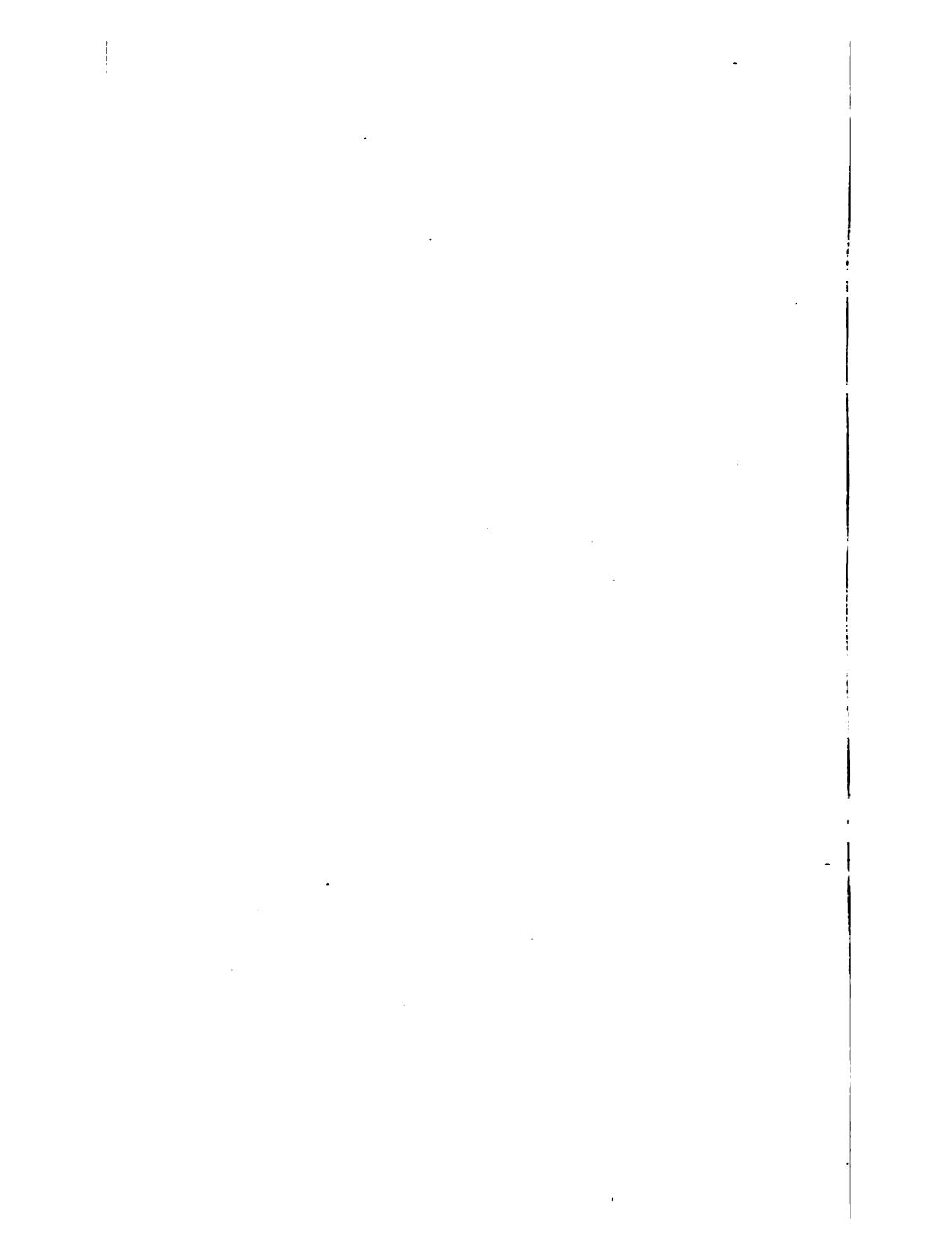
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THEODOSIUS *the younger, Emperor of the East.*
ATTILA, *King of the Huns.*
ADRIAN, *a Christian fanatic.*
MARCIAN, *a Senator.*
CHRYSAPHIUS, *Chamberlain to THEODOSIUS.*
PRISCUS, *of Thrace, an historian.*
VIGILIUS, *a Syrian gentleman.*
VALENS, *son to VIGILIUS.*
ORESTES, *a gentleman of Pannonia,* }
EDECON, *Chief of the Scyrræ,* }
ANATOLIUS, *Patriarch of Constantinople.*
A CITIZEN of Constantinople.
ERNAC, *a child, son of ATTILA.*
ESLAM, }
RONA, }
SCOTTA, *a Scythian augur.*
PULCHERIA, *sister to THEODOSIUS.*
CLAUDIA, *wife to PRISCUS.*
ILDICA, *daughter to PRISCUS.*
CERCA, *wife to ATTILA.*

*Roman senators, priests, citizens, soldiers, attendants ;
Scythian warriors, boys, women ; slaves ; a Moorish and
a Scythian buffoon, &c.*

TIME: *Middle of the Fifth Century.*

PLACES: *Constantinople and ATTILA's Royal Village in
the Plains of Dacia.*



ACT I

SCENE I.—Audience chamber in the Palace at Constantinople, with raised dais on the left. Doors right and left and at back of stage.
(Enter PRISCUS and VIGILIUS from opposite sides.)

Priscus. Well met, Vigilius, you come betimes
To attend the council which the Emperor
Doth hold this day, to weigh the stern demands
Of Attila's ambassadors.

Vigilius. My heart,
A foundering ship, o'erfreighted with grave
care,
Gives me no rest. What think you of our
case?

The Roman name cannot have sunk so low
That this rude Hun dare unavenged deride it?
Are we indeed thrown prostrate from that
height
To which our wisest rulers lifted us—

GOD'S SCOURGE

Great Constantine, the founder of this city,
And Theodosius, brave and generous,
Our bulwark 'gainst the inroads of the Goths ?
I go not back in my account beyond
The first foundation of Constantinople.

Priscus. By History's faint light I should say
"Yes" ;

But I am somewhat doubtful on the point.
My trade makes me suspicious, for I know
That I myself do often smooth events
To tickle nicely Theodosius' ear
Bent graciously to catch my written tale.
Blind Prejudice is innate in man's nature,
E'en care he little for the fact discussed ;
Its action is increased for minute things,
Since men, like dogs, will snarl and fight
the more

The smaller be the bone of their contention.
As wreathing mists upon a hill's high slope
Augment and render fully visible
Far scenes beyond the ken of human vision,
So prejudice doth see and picture forth
What is a credit unto him who paints ;
The bleared, uncertain sight of age alone

GOD'S SCOURGE

Reviews his subjects of humiliation.

We must remember this important point :

'Tis Romans who have mostly sketched the
pace

Of matters in their own dominions.

Vigilius. The kindly, studious Theodosius
Hath not the warrior's arm, the statesman's
craft

To free his Empire from this strange bar-
barian.

Great Attila possesseth the fierce courage
Owned by half-savage peoples, in him coupled
With that beguiling, subtle management
Which only marks those men bred up by
Fortune

In sleek Civilisation's artifice.

Priscus. It is a mischance when a reigning father
Succumbs ere his succeeding son attaineth
Man's firm estate. It seems pursuing Fate
Doth make out such for weakness and decay.
Pulcheria, wise princess as she is,
Declared Augusta by her dying father,
Hath kept her younger brother in subjection.
'Tis she who sways the Empire of the East.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Vigilius. Far better would it be for us were't so.

She hath renounced the vanities of life,
And comes forth only from her close retire-
ment

In times of peril, to uphold the State.

To Chrysaphius, whom he calls his chamber-
lain,

The gentle Theodosius late hath lent
His ear too much.

Priscus. The base, unmanly cur!

His creeping step, his crafty, withered face
Stir up my bile to ebullition.
The way this slave with stealthy, vile ex-
tortions

Hath grossly wronged his fellow-citizens
Will finish his career. The populace
Cry death upon the vampire, by whose lips
Their very blood is drawn.

(*A Trumpet call is sounded without, followed
by martial music.*)

Vigilius. Softly; the Emperor

Approaches with his sister and his train.

(*Enter MARCIAN and Senators in groups,
conversing. MARCIAN joins PRISCUS and*

GOD'S SCOURGE

VIGILIUS. *Enter THEODOSIUS leading PULCHERIA (who is dressed in monastic garb), followed by ANATOLIUS, Roman soldiers, and attendants. A soldier carries the Labarum, the sacred banner of the Eastern Empire. THEODOSIUS and PULCHERIA mount the dais.)*

Theodosius. O Romans, here to-day we meet in sorrow.

Victorious Attila's ambassadors
Now wait without. How shall we meet
demands

A sense of might will make exorbitant?
Our treasure is exhausted. No support
In arms or money can we hope to gain
From Valentinian, our devoted cousin,
The Emperor of the West. Unto the utmost
Needs he his full resources. Hapless Rome
Twice in the little space spanned by four
decades

Hath been deflowered by barbarian kings.
She hath not yet recovered her late shock,
The bloody rapine of fierce Genseric,
The Vandals' king. And, like a wily cat

GOD'S SCOURGE

Awaiting time to spring and seize her prey,
In South Gaul lies the Goth, Theodoric,
Successor of that ruthless Alaric
Who first o'erturned the sacred walls of Rome.
Yet Valentinian is so far protected,
He hath the great patrician *Ætius*, who
By vigilance restrains Theodoric,
Whilst warding off a dreaded Scythian on-
slaught.

Fierce Attila conceived a happy love
For *Ætius*, who was sent, a boyish hostage,
To Rugilas, the uncle of the King.

A strange chance also, in his morn of life,
Despatched this *Ætius* as a Roman hostage
To Alaric the Goth, whereby he met
And gained the goodwill of Theodoric.
Beyond this, *Ætius* is a mighty warrior.
For Rome he thus a triple bar provides,
Against both Huns and Goths.

Murcian (moodily). With bitter pain,
I hear the Emperor lay conscious stress
Upon the merits of the gallant *Ætius*.
(*To THEODOSIUS*). Your own domain counts
many valiant hearts,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Which, if less meritorious, are as willing
To offer their life's blood.

Theodosius. Alas ! Good Marcian,
You read too harshly our ill-chosen words.

Pulcheria. His fortune in the genius of his
general

Is far outweighed to luckless Valentinian
By that dire influence his sister wreaks
Upon his Throne. The young Princess
Honoria,

By her indignant mother, twelve years since,
Was hither sent, to sternly expiate
Her sin of guilty intrigue with a menial.

She sought to share the harsh, monastic life,
The chosen lot of Theodosius' sisters ;

But hopeless was this sinner of their crown.
So she hath pined and fretted, and at length
She hath in secret sent to Attila,

To make an offer of herself as wife,
The bribe of his consent her rightful dower
Of half the Western Empire.

Anatolius. Woful news !

This poor, misguided lady, whom I thought,
Full reconciled and bent to penitence,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Hath wantonly, by this most shameless act,
Invited Rome's remorseless enemy
To sweep away the throne of Valentinian.

Theodosius. Unhappily, this offer gives the Hun
A tinge of justice for a future claim
On Valentinian, should his love for *Aetius*
Be conquered by ambition or by death.

Pulcheria. It is of urgency, O Theodosius,
Honoria be sent hence at once to Rome.

Theodosius. This matter doubtless lends a sterner
tone

To Attila's demands.

Marcian. O, great Augustus,
Why bribe this man? Alert your soldiers
stand,

(Indicating the soldiers.)

Their muscles quivering with their ready pose
To march at slightest indication.

Why waste in idleness their manly strength?
I long have changed the casque and lorica
For peaceful toga; yet now in mine age
Mine idle armour gladly will I don
To free my country. See our sacred banner,

(Points to the Labarum.)

GOD'S SCOURGE

The great Labarum, where is fashionéd
The Roman eagle, and those mystic letters
Symbolic of our faith. Shall it be lifted up,
An idle toy for useless pomp's display,
And never more incite the Roman legions
To deeds of valour ?

Pulcheria (*to THEODOSIUS*). Hear the noble
Marcian !

Theodosius. Think you, O Romans, we can hope
to cope
With Attila's unending forces ?

Chrysaphius. Never !
What power have men to exhaust the rapid
torrent

Which leaps down ceaselessly the mountain
side

From never-failing source of snow and ice ?
How can we hope to cope with myriad
hordes,

Including men as numberless as leaves
In the Hyrcinian Wood ? A bloody rout
Might check awhile the vast mass of bar
barians ;

But, *Theodosius*, that will cost most dear.

GOD'S SCOURGE

We first must soak our soil with Roman
blood.

If that were all ! Alas ! the Scythian ranks
Would fill again, as swiftly as foul flies,
Destroyed by what they feed on, bring to life
The greater swarms.

Priscus (aside to VIGILIUS). You hear ? E'er
thus it is.

Who should invigorate his loyal subjects
By native prowess, he is merest tool
Of slaves and women.

Vigilius (aside). Prithee, Priscus, peace !
The ever-watchful Chrysaphius bends
His furtive eye this way.

Priscus. Base, abject slave !

Theodosius. We will receive now, Chrysaphius,
those

Whom Attila hath sent with terms of peace.

(Exit CHRYSAPHIUS. Flourish of trumpets.

*Re-enter CHRYSAPHIUS. Enter EDECON
and ORESTES, followed by a train of
Scythians.)*

Theodosius (to ORESTES). What says your king
to our proposed terms ?

GOD'S SCOURGE

Orestes. My lord and thy lord, Theodosius,
Accepts no terms. The Monarch of the Huns,
The Sovereign of the warlike Scythian
hordes,
The Elect of the Universal God, by whom
He hath been named "His Scourge," he doth
not treat

With conquered subject; he dictates his will.

Marcian. Now, by the shield of Mars! such
insolence

Shall thy barbarian master dearly rue!

Anatolius (to MARCIAN). That Pagan oath of
thine but ill becomes thee.

Marcian. I cannot pick my words on such
occasion.

Theodosius. Good Marcian, silence. (*To EDECON*)
Do you, Scythian, shortly
Detail your master's terms.

Edecon. He claims domains
Of which the extent is measured by a journey
Enduring fifteen days.

Pulcheria. A somewhat vague
And too elastic limit.

Theodosius (to EDECON). Be exact.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Edecon. He claims that spreading space of fruitful plain

Which stretcheth from the city Singidunum
(Built on the fertile Danube's southern bank)
To Novæ in far Thrace. He also asks
That Margus market to Naissus straight
Be then transferred.

Theodosius. What say you, Priscus ?

Priscus. This :

That Attila hath chosen well his prey ;
He takes the body of our lands in Europe,
And leaves us but the skirts !

Theodosius (to EDECON). What more ?

Edecon. He wills

The tribute yielded erstwhile by his subject,
The Emperor of the East, be straightway raised
From seven hundred weighty pounds of gold,
To thrice that sum.

Orestes. Moreover, Emperor,

Our king demandeth, in immediate payment
Of all expense for this our embassy,
Six thousand pounds of gold.

Chrysaphius (aside). I fear me much

The Romans will not bear the added tax.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Theodosius. What further claims ?

Orestes. Victorious Attila

Requires from you all prisoners of war,
Who must be yielded up without a ransom ;
But, as it rests with him terms to dictate,
He yields you not your prisoned men without
Due payment. E'en those Romans who
escaped

Our careless guard must buy their liberty,
Each with twelve pieces of his hoarded gold.

Marcian (to THEODOSIUS). Invincible Augustus !

Prove your right

To your high-sounding title ! Give me permit
To ram these words of insult down the throat
Of him who dared advance them !

Chrysaphius. Calm your wrath.

It is for Theodosius to make answer.

Priscus (aside). Ye gods ! Now grant me
patience !

Orestes (to THEODOSIUS). Attila

Asks of you all deserters from his ranks,
Who have ta'en refuge with you ; these he
asks

To dole them their due punishment of death.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Marcian (throwing himself at the foot of the dais). O Theodosius, blacken not your name,

The name your grandsire bore ; blast not the annals

*Of Constantine's proud city by a deed
Which will be surest death-blow to your fame !*

What ! Shall we let the sneering, jealous world

*Point at us in derision as it whispers,
“ The Throne of Constantine is sunk indeed,
Since its once holy bulwark can no longer
Protect the suppliants crouching at its foot ” ?*

*Theodosius (rising). We will deliberate in privacy
What we have heard, ere resting on our answer.*

*(To CHRYSAPHIUS.) To thy providing care
we here commit*

The Scythians.

(Exeunt THEODOSIUS, PULCHERIA, ANATOLIUS, Senators, and train. Stirring march played. MARCIAN remains on his knees, his face hidden in his hands.)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Edecon (to ORESTES). Hear you these martial strains ?

The Roman blood must be grown thin and pale

That with such tonic it keeps coldly dull.

Chrysaphius. This way, most noble Edecon.

(*Aside*). I would

Have speech with thee.

Edecon. I'm here to speak and listen. (*Exeunt*.)

SCENE II.—*Gallery with mosaic portraits on the walls, in the Palace at Constantinople.*

(Enter **CHRYSAPHIUS** and **VIGILIUS**.)

Chrysaphius. The Emperor loves you well, Vigilius ;

He contemplates a rising of your fortunes
To pinnacles above the loftiest aims.

He trusts to you a matter of import,
Enabling you to be the worshipped saviour
Of your distracted land, to make a name
Near which that of Leonidas turns pale,

GOD'S SCOURGE

As starry lustre fades before the beams
Of God's resplendent sunshine. He, moreover,
Now offers you a means of sure revenge
On him who hath o'ershadowed your
existence,
To whose foul stroke you owe at once the
death
Of your bewailed wife, the injury
To your fair son.

Vigilius (furiously). Touch not upon that
theme!

Chrysaphius. You are o'er hasty in your bitter
grief.

The beauteous Valens hath the goodliest parts,
Decked out with virtue, handsome as a god,
Well dowered with abilities of brain,
And that due meed of fruitful industry
Without which no creative brain can match
The dullest plodder's barren intellect.
It is a pity such a splendid youth
Should show distaste for every martial art,
And in his youthful prime neglect his sports
To question the dread mysteries of Nature,
Like agéd sage or wizard skilled in magic.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Vigilius (fiercely). Is it from thee should come
a bitter taunt
Of lacking manhood? He who searches
Nature
To separate her elements, and find
What dread, strange secrets lie close hid
therein,
Needs far more courage than your purblind
soldier,
Who gives or takes a death-blow at command.

Chrysaphius. My poor Vigilius, thou hast due
cause
To hate the memory of that fierce raid
Which youthful Attila let loose on Antioch.
The savage slaughter which o'ertook your
wife,
Brought such keen, haunting fear to your
young child,
He shrank and crouched in anguish long
years after
At merest sight of bright unsheathéd steel.

Vigilius. And I have sworn revenge on that
fierce Hun,
The savage ravisher of Eastern Rome,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Who, when the God of War sits on his breast,
Becomes a furious, mad, destroying fiend.
He feeds on blood, and sees no plenty round,
Till streams grow red and fields are paved
with slain.

Chrysaphius (aside). He is our own and will
meet our proposals.

(Aloud). Our gracious Emperor doth well
intend

To gratify your fury. Know you not
The Senate hath selected our shrewd Priscus
To be our legate to the Hunnish king?

Vigilius. I have been told it.

Chrysaphius. With him you will go
As twin ambassador, but carrying
A message of expediency, disclosed
To you alone. It hath been argued
That Attila must die. Lift not your brows.
It is the Romans' only hope. This Hun,
Whose path is so destructive that the grass
Ne'er rears its head where once his horse
hath trod,

Appears to bear a charméd life. E'er
foremost

GOD'S SCOURGE

Where danger clings most closely, Attila,
Who thins our ranks, receives in turn no
hurt.

It seems that on the field of battle Death
Will not lay hand upon him ; we must try
If he prove equally impregnable
To secret steel in his own camp's recesses.
This deed to thine hand is entrusted.

Vigilius. Mine !

Vigilius turn assassin, strike a blow,
Protected by the cloak of Roman legate,
Creep like a serpent to the enemy's hearth,
And slay the leader ? Never, Chrysaphius !
Revenge with me must be as man to man,
Not as the crouching tiger, whose still leap
O'ercomes the strong and unsuspecting lion,
Whose savage rage and massive strength he
fears.

I deal not in such infamy. And why
This choice of me ? Why not my fellow,
Priscus ?

Chrysaphius. Because he is of philosophic bent ;
He takes all calmly, as he does religion.
Sees good and bad in everything. He judges

GOD'S SCOURGE

Mankind from his too liberal standpoint; then
He hath no private hatred to avenge.
Vigilius, Theodosius waits your answer ;
Consider well, then bring your fixed decision
With speed to me. (Exit.)

Vigilius. It is a burning insult
Against my manhood and the Roman race,
That this false wretch should dare his
treachery
To me, a Roman citizen, disclose. (Exit.)

SCENE III.—*Room in PRISCUS' house at Constantinople.*

(Enter CLAUDIA and ILDICA.)

Claudia. How now, Ildica ? Still unsatisfied ?
Ildica. The presence of this Adrian in my
father's house
Doth vex my soul within me. I care not
How soon his fix'd place here knows him not.
Claudia. What vanity enwraps you ? Dare you
think
An earthly love can sway that saint, a being

GOD'S SCOURGE

With such firm hold upon his lower self,
That he could live for weary years close
chained

Upon a lofty pillar's crampéd top,
Dependent for his scanty sustenance
On casual passers in the Syrian wastes ?

Ildica. Good madam, to that very circumstance
I lay my fear. His cruel, long-drawn torture,
Quite voluntary as it was, unfits
The crazéd being to mingle with the world.
I dread his eye, his touch ; I loathe his
contact !

It was an evil day that brought him down
From aerial quarters (which long occupation
Had rendered fittest habitation for him),
To brave the savage wrath of Chrysaphius,
And then seek shelter in my father's house.

Claudia. You should revere him for self-
abnegation,
Requiring in his case contempt of danger.
But you love that cold selfishness, which
veils
An innate cowardice beneath the mask
Of studious tastes and love of meditation.

GOD'S SCOURGE

I see you take the meaning of my words.
This holy man but sought the world again
When Theodosius, who consulted him,
Besought his aid to heal the frightful schism
Which cleaves the Eastern Church. Good
Adrian clung
At Ephesus' dark council to that party
Which martyred Flavian, our late patriarch,
Upheld against the Alexandrine prelate
And his vile godson, Chrysaphius.

Ildica. Yes ;

My father used his influence with the
Emperor
To shelter Adrian from his tempted doom.
He should not make return for such a boon
By sowing discord in his saviour's house.
I fear my father is but too correct
When he ascribes the sinking Roman fame
To Christianity's unending feuds.

(Enter ADRIAN.)

Adrian (to *Ildica*). With grief again I check
upon your lips
Such words of blasphemous and dangerous
doubts.

GOD'S SCOURGE

The spirit of her pagan ancestors
Still rules the Christian maiden. How is
this ?

Ildica. An ardent lover of Christ's lowly tenets,
I now shrink from the spirit His believers
Judge fit to show.

Claudia. List to her, holy Adrian !
Can you not combat this fast-growing evil ?
I leave this wandering lamb to your sure
charge ;
Restore it to the fold.

Ildica (aside, clutching her dress). Nay, Claudia,
nay ;

Leave me not here with this distracted man !

Claudia (aside). Thou fool ! This certainty of
self-conceit

Is greatest cause of misery, sly breeder
Of bitter disappointment, fears like thine,
Of rusting sloth which eats the energy,
And makes the will await the tardy hour
Which never comes. Release my robe at
once !

(Exit.)

Adrian (aside). A tremor moves her, as the
gentle wind

GOD'S SCOURGE

Doth ripple Ocean's blue inviting breast.
Alluring creature ! O most wretched being !
I only can resist a strong temptation
When held and chained in ghastly solitude,
Far from the tempting object. (*Aloud.*) What
fear you ?

Ildica (*coldly*). I have no fear. Why should I ?
What could fright me

In mine own father's house ?

Adrian. A hapless solitary,
My rough uncouthness might indeed offend
you.

For you have never suffered thirst and hunger,
The rain so pitiless, the fierce sun's rays,
To mortify your passions, make yourself
A fitting gnest for Heaven.

Ildica. I have not ;
There is no need ; the sense of fitness differs
With individuals. I am calm and equable ;
I try to do my duty where it lies,
And worship God with varied actions, helpful
To all my fellows. This is Life's fair duty,
As noble Priscus taught it to his daughter.
He taught her that man's honest industry

GOD'S SCOURGE

Must be more grateful to a Deity
Than living like a stone, set up in the desert,
Of use to none.

Adrian (sneering). And can a father's hand
Have writ thus deeply in the tablets of your
mind ?

Hath not the able style of Syrian Valens
A share in tracing these firm lines ?

Ildica. May be.

I never have denied that my own mind
Hath bowed beneath the lofty influence
Of Valens' seeking, seeing intellect.

The dear companion of my happy childhood,
My girlhood's trusted, ever-faithful friend,
Doth hold a place within this heart of mine,
Which none can occupy or share !

Adrian (aside). Her words

Pierce deep, and leave their rankling sting
behind.

(Aloud). The years I passed in Solitude's
devotions

Have seen a change pass over Roman maids.
The words strike oddly on mine ears, which
purport

GOD'S SCOURGE

The close attachment in a maid of Thrace
For arrant Syrian coward !

Ildica. Who is perfect ?

The bravery of rude Dalmatia's sons
Is far outweighed to me by the invention,
The genius born in dreamy Syria.

And what is cowardice ? What is true valour ?

Adrian. How happy is the youth so well upheld
By these sweet lips ! For thou art fair, *Ildica* ;
Thou art so very fair !

Ildica. Good *Adrian*, cease.

Such words but ill become you. My poor looks
Concern you not.

Adrian. Sweet being of grace ineffable,
Shrink not from me ! Your wise and gentle
maxims

Raise gathering echoes in my perished heart !

Ildica. Your words exceed the bounds of
courtesy.

The daughter of a kind, protective host
Meeds due consideration from the guest . . .
Belovéd Valens !

(Enter VALENS, PRISCUS, VIGILIUS ; re-enter
CLAUDIA. *ILDICA* *clings to VALENS*.)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Claudia. Is this fitting greeting

From modest maiden to her suitor ? Priscus,
Your daughter's bearing merits strict reproof.

Priscus. We'll e'en o'erlook it this time. Come,
come, wife ;

They are affiancéd lovers, soon to be
In wedlock's bonds united.

Adrian (aside). Some chance hand

May haply turn the course of fixed arrange-
ment.

(*Looks at ILDICA*). With joy she scans his
face, hangs on his words ;

She loves him.

Valens. Sweet Ildica, what disturbance

Hath left such shadow in thine eyes ?

Ildica. 'Tis naught.

Here was I left to ill companionship ;
And I distrust, I fear a sleeping violence.

Valens (glancing at ADRIAN). Ay ! When the
reasoning centre is unset,

A man no longer calls his will his own
To curb and check, but rests upon its
dictates,

The sport of its caprice.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Priscus (to CLAUDIA). I have been chosen
To bear an answer to the Huns. Vigilius,
Who hath once sojourned with the Scythian
hordes,
He goes with me to lend experienced counsel.
(To VIGILIUS). The mission, friend, scarce
seems to please, so black
And ominous hath been that pleated brow,
Since this affair was mooted. What can ail
thee ?

Vigilius. The shadow of slow death lies over
those
Who seek the distant camp of Attila.
He nails his enemies to trees, and leaves
them
To perish of thirst, famine, and exposure.
A not consoling picture, truly !

Priscus. Tush !
The Scythian hordes are rude ; they are
barbarians ;
But Attila doth rise above his subjects,
As Hercules o'ertopped the strength of men.
A legate's person e'er is sacred held,
And honest embassy need fear no wrong.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Adrian (aside). Did Valens but go with them, he
were well

Cleared from my cumbered path.

Ildica. My honoured father,

A long fatiguing journey lies before you
When you perform the Emperor's behest.

Priscus. Fatiguing? Tush! A little weariness
Is well laid out to purchase information.
A dolt must he be who can penetrate
Into fresh fields and cull thence no new
flower.

Adrian. And doth young Valens, with the enter-
prise

Of ardent youth, go with thee, good Vigilius?
Or do his learnéd studies and researches
Still chain him to Constantinople?

Vigilius. Nay,

My son goes not with me.

Priscus. And wherefore not?

The expedition will be one of mark,
Will be most beneficial to the youth.

Vigilius. Say no more on it. The enterprise is not
Of such high honour men should strive to
join it.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Valens (to **VIGILIUS**). Grant me permission, sir,
to go with you.

Claudia (to **VALENS**). Why urge your father thus
against his will ?

Valens. Can I let false plea of faint heart and
sloth

Swell my already burdened reputation ?
And I desire to go ; the rumoured customs
Of this great, warlike people much excite
My curiosity.

Priscus. And go you shall ;
I see your father is relenting.

Ildica. Valens,
This is so like you, seeking some new path
To reach the enticing fields of varied know-
ledge.

Valens. Ambition treads close on the heels of
Effort,
To urge her on. I must be worthy thee !
The world thinks much of prowess in the
field
(For which I have no skill, or inclination) ;
So I perforce must train my parts to win
Completest conquest in the mind's wide realm,

GOD'S SCOURGE

And give my country something which will
match

A valiant general's bloody victory.

Vigilius (aside). Should my hand fail, my head
alone will fall,

Be Attila as just and generous
As Rumour's voice declares him. Be the
attempt

Crowned with success, then the bereavéd
Scythians

Will slaughter all the party, wooing death
With slowest tortures cruelty can find.

I shall not fail. And better few to fall
Than this whole Empire, for whose sake I
offer

My son, my friend, and mine own worthless
life.

Adrian. I leave your house to-day, most noble
Priscus.

Affairs of moment call me; I must go.

Ildica (aside). Most joyful news!

Claudia. An unwise resolution.

Priscus (to *ADRIAN*). Well, as you will. I seek
not to detain you;

GOD'S SCOURGE

But do not thrust your head in Danger's
mouth.

Strive not again to kindle scorching flames
Of your providing, being at one time
The motive and the fuel of the fire.

(To ILDICA). I leave young Valens to your
entertainment ;

I have much to arrange now with his father.

(*Exeunt slowly ILDICA and VALENS, watched by
ADRIAN.*)

(To CLAUDIA). Wilt thou come also with us,
dearest wife ?

(*Exeunt PRISCUS, VIGILIUS, and CLAUDIA.*)

Adrian. My God ! Why hast thou cursed me
with a heart

Of nature so depraved, yet mated with
A dread ability to recognise
Things evil and to loathe them ? Succour
me !

My nature is a storm, a raging tempest,
For ever either brooding or exploding,
Unsolaced by the sweetness of a calm.
Have I not fiercely wrestled with myself
Throughout long weary years ? Hard victory

GOD'S SCOURGE

Hath it e'er been to keep my evil down.
Shall I give up the fight towards the end ?
The desert's calm awaits me as before.
The devils which there tempted me were
weak
Beside this Roman maiden's potent spells.
A baleful destiny made me descend
The lofty pillar's holy sanctuary,
To mingle in the turbid lot of men.
I strive to heal the schism in the Church ?
I seek to ease men's fevered, wrangling
minds,
When mine own spirit is in full rebellion ?
An awful thought is creeping in my soul.
If I away this night to Attila,
I can outstrip the Roman embassy.
The youthful Valens, as it seems, will go.
My influence with Attila is great ;
He thinks I hold the secrets of fell spirits
Within my grasp. One word, with art
selected,
And Valens hither never will return.
I fear him, hate him ; how I envy him !
I will away to Attila ; mayhap

GOD'S SCOURGE

Chance may point out to me a better plan.
Ildica is my only hope on earth.
The very calm of her philosophy
Can cool the hot stream of my boiling blood,
Allay the fever in this throbbing head,
Restore long absent reason and repose.
Her presence can drive off the gibing fiends
Who haunt my life, a threatening foretaste
Of what a sinner must endure in Hell.
But why should I so fear the pangs of Hell?
Have they not been my constant lot for
years?
I will not struggle longer ; I give way !
Stay ! Life is short, however far drawn out,
Compared to Eternity's unending years—
Unless Eternity be but a myth,
The product of one man's inventive brain ?
Suppose this life be ALL ? Have I enjoyed
The good which falls to happier men ? 'Tis
wise
The little to resign to grasp the great . . .
But if there be no great ? These doubts are
dangerous,
(*Looks fearfully around.*)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Offend All-seeing Eyes which search the heart,
And bring upon the doubter punishment.

Ay ; there they rise, the huge and formless
shadows,

Soon to assume some horrifying shapes.

(Covers his face.)

In vain do I shut out a maddening sight,

Which hampers and embitters mine existence.

Shall I ne'er free myself from this dread
crew ?

O Lord, my lot is more than I can bear !

How can a feeble man cope with strong
fiends,

When naked and unproofed for such a combat

You send him hither ? Hence, ye fearful
shapes !

I cannot face them ; I am weak and powerless.

Aid me, ye saints, in mine extremity !

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

SCENE I.—ATTILA'S Royal Village in the plains of Dacia. Exterior of ATTILA'S wooden palace, surrounded by a wooden palisade strengthened by towers at intervals. In the far distance the Carpathian Mountains, and nearer are round Scythian huts of straw and mud. Scythian warriors, women and slaves are grouped about.

(Enter PRISCUS, VIGILIUS, VALENS, and their train of Romans and Slaves, with ORESTES, EDECON, and their Scythian escort. The Scythians greet their fellows. EDECON passes into the palace.)

Priscus. At length we have attained our journey's end.

A place well worth a long and close inspection
It seemeth me to be.

Vigilius. Our weary journey
Calls for some better end than this.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Priscus. This sight

Was not the motive of our embassy ;
But unto me it gives that welcome pleasure
Which offers food for meditation. Come,
Young Valens, let us have the vote of youth.
Find you no interest in this curious camp ?
Our journey, was it barren of enjoyment ?

Valens. I must side with thee, Priscus, in this
matter.

(To VIGILIUS). Dear father, much I fear some
hidden grief

Hath kept that weary shade upon thy face.

Vigilius. By no means, son. Enough for spleen is
found

In those privations we have had to bear
Since we attained the Hunnish territory,
And found no human signs, but doleful ruins
Of what were once important Roman cities.

Priscus. Unhappily too true. But then com-
menced

The more exciting part of our adventures,
Experience brimful of instruction !
We fared as fared the Scythian hordes of
old ;

GOD'S SCOURGE

In marching we have fed on curds, and meat
Half-cooked and mortified by close impact
Between each rider's saddle and his horse !

Valens. And with the vigorous demanding hunger
Unwonted exercise did breed in me,
Ne'er banquet with more relish was dis-
patched.

Vigilius. Son, not by me ; such diet likes me not.

Priscus. Necessity's sharp tooth is surest spur
Of slow, reluctant Inclination.

What dainty whets, with its enticing savour,
The appetite like Hunger's gnawing pain ?

(*A troop of maidens advance with musical
instruments and long broad scarves in
their hands.*)

See, Valens, yonder group of lovely maids,
With lengthy scarves of linen in their hands !
What can it mean ? Some native rite, I
trow.

Vigilius (impatiently). Why vex your head with
what concerns you not ?

Priscus. Strange, native customs *are* concern of
mine ;
They merit strict research.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Vigilius. What matter they ?

Priscus (taking out his tablets). 'Tis wise to
snatch at opportunity.

I can adapt them to some good account,
Win gold and fame thereby. If we return
not

(As you so darkly hinted from the hour
We left our homes), but should we perish
here,

And leave our bones to whiten on these
plains,

These notes I have scratched here (*holding*
up the tablets) have ta'en no time
Worth grieving over as a wanton waste
Of that short hour we haply have to live.

Not that a violence I anticipate ;
We come protected by our office ; and,
If history speak truth, to spoken compact
Are Scythians true. Why seek out cause for
fear ?

The appointed moment of our passage hence
Doth lie with God, conceal'd in the hollow
Of His o'ershadowing Palm. 'Tis like the
knell

GOD'S SCOURGE

Hath sounded; but it may not ring, per-
chance,

For years to come. Then, why, my good
Vigilius,

Should I neglect to store my willing mind
With what will be (an live we) of utility?

Wisdom prepares for life not death, which
needs

No providential garner but a grave.

This exhibition of strange Hunnish customs
Is opportune, for they will read right well
In that detailed account of mine own times
I am compiling, and in which the Huns
Must needs bear prominent and lengthy part.

(*Re-enter EDECON. Enter CERCA and ERNAC,
and female attendants bearing refresh-
ments.*)

Cerca. A welcome to you, Romans. In his
absence

The queen and favourite son of Attila
Bid you a hearty welcome to his camp.

Priscus (bowing). A thousand thanks, fair lady;
thanks, brave boy.

I speak for my companions as myself.

GOD'S SCOURGE

(At a sign from CERCA the women bring forward a silver table on which are bread, salt, and wine. The Romans take each a morsel of bread and salt, and put their lips to the goblets.)

Priscus. A message unto Attila, the king,
We bear from the Invincible Augustus,
Great Theodosius, Emperor of the East.

Cerca. Your visit is well timed ; this eve at latest
Here cometh Attila with many warriors.

Priscus. To thee, great queen, the Emperor of the
East

Sends gifts of fitting value and design,
The produce of his subjects' industry.

*(Beckons up two Nubian slaves, loaded with
presents.)*

These gold and silver cups were framed and
chased

By artisans of skill in Eastern Rome.

These fleeces, stripped from Syria's choicest
sheep,

Are coloured with the famous Tyrian purple,
Devoted to the Cæsars and their sacred race.

These dainty fruits, preserved and dried with
care,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Were nurtured in the fertile vales of Greece.
His last poor offering is this Indian pepper,
A rare and appetising condiment
For kingly tables, sought with Danger's toil
By Arab merchants of adventurous hearts
Far East, beyond the Ganges' sacred stream.

Cerca. These princely gifts the queen of Attila
Receives with gratitude. Ask what you will ;
The best we have is for your entertainment.

(Exeunt CERCA, ERNAC, and attendants.)

Edecon (to VALENS). I see your watchful eyes, my
gentle Roman,

Rest in some admiration on the maids
Collecting yonder to receive the king.

Valens. I marvel, Edecon, to see around
So many beauteous, fair-haired, long-limbed
women :

No kith, methinks, of swarthy, thick-set Hun ?
They seem akin to some Germanic tribe,
With their long yellow locks and supple frames.

Edecon (laughing). Think you, most simple youth,
the long-armed Huns,
With strength to take and keep e'en what
they fancy,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Have eyes less keen than yours for beauty rare?
The Hunnish women, who no beauty boast,
Are made for use, not ornament or pleasure;
Enjoyment (when its edge is somewhat
dulled

By rapine, war and bloodshed, his chief joy)
The Hun seeks in the arms of fairer mates
Than he can find among his kith and kin.

Priscus (*to ORESTES*). By what strange chances
comes it that, the offspring

From Roman noble of Pannonia,
I find you trusted agent of the Huns?

Orestes. For that blame the exactions of your
Emperors.

To many Roman subjects the Huns' advent
More than oppression brought a true relief.

Priscus. But you, a Roman, must yet feel de-
graded,

To wait on that barbaric enemy
Who desolates and spoils your native land?

Orestes. Why should a simple gentleman feel
shame,

When kings and princes vie among themselves
To be his lieutenants, his faithful captains?

GOD'S SCOURGE

Edecon (*to PRISCUS*). Had Attila been born a citizen of Rome,

He would have been a hero in thine eyes,
As he is unto us. But in his tent,
The warrior Hun is base, barbaric, savage.

Priscus (*aside to VIGILIUS*). Rare judgment lies in this most true reproach.

The Romans have unwisely underrated,
And ta'en ill measure of the faculties
Their foe possesseth.

(*Music heard in the distance, and shouts.*)

Scythians (*shaking their spears and clashing their shields*). Attila ! The King !

Edecon. Advance, ye women ; greet your hero king.

(*Re-enter CERCA with ERNAC and her women. Exeunt maidens dancing, playing cymbals and tambourines, and waving the linen streamers, followed by a band of women singing :—*)

Chorus of Women. Attila, mighty King,

Hither fast cometh !

Now let the prowess ring

Which him adorneth.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Conqueror of the World !
Emperors downward hurled
Acknowledge thy fame
And shrink at thy name !

Priscus (to VIGILIUS). I fear me much the merits
of this man

Bode no good for the Roman realms. The
awe,

The proud delight these Scythians hold their
king,

Point to an influence which passes that
Victorious warrior gains o'er those he leads.

Scythians. Attila approacheth !

*(Re-enter the women in two lines, holding
the linen streamers by way of canopy
over the troupe of singing maidens.
Enter after them ATTILA, his subject
kings and captains, at the head of his
warriors.)*

Chorus of Maidens. Ye Scythian hordes, behold
we bring

In triumph Attila, the King
Lift a great and free thanksgiving !
Let your shouts delight the living,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Let them rouse the dead !
Our hero Attila is come
In safety to his favoured home,
Flushed with victory in the field,
Decked with conquests' golden yield.
Blessings on his head !

Scythians. Attila ! Great Attila !

Attila. My children, to you greeting. Joyfully
I gaze again on good friends left behind.
Dear wife ! Belovéd son ! (*To CERCA.*) Who
are these Romans ?

Cerca. They are ambassadors from Theodosius.

Attila. 'Tis well. (*To VIGILIUS.*) What answer do
ye bring from him ?

Vigilius. He grants the terms ; the pounds of
gold demanded,
All shall be fully paid.

Attila. My base deserters,
Will they be rendered unto me and death ?

Priscus. This point alone is left to our discretion.
We ask your yielding, here to mighty
warrior

More honourable than a firm adherence
To wrongful cruelty.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila. I yield not here.

The cravens from the ranks of Attila
No pardon can receive. Your Emperor
Must give them up to me. Another time
We will talk further on this matter; now
Affairs of pressing weight claim our at-
tention.

This night we hold a regal banquet, where
We hope to see you, Romans, as our guests.

Priscus. We do accept, O king, the valued
honour

You vouchsafe to us.

(*Exeunt* ATTILA, CERCA and ERNAC *into*
the palace. The Scythians leave the
stage shouting.)

Scythians. Attila! Great Attila! (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II.—*Room in ATTILA's Palace.*

(*Enter ADRIAN.*)

Adrian. 'Tis easier far to keep the door fast shut
Than close it, opened by a vicious crowd,
To which we have in weakness yielded entry.

GOD'S SCOURGE

My guilty purpose stares me in the face ;
I see it in its naked hideousness.
As yet it but peeps through the windows of
my soul,
And has not entered ; yet its baneful eyes
Rest full on mine, and make me know my-
self.

Ildica of her will can ne'er be mine.
What gain I get I e'en must seize by Stealth,
Whose padded foot creeps in so silently,
To take before suspected, then is gone.
I love her innocence. She thinks me mad ;
I see the thought dwell in her frightened eye,
Whenever I approach her. I am sane ;
For I have self-control, chose I to seek it.
There is the hellish part : the consciousness
I could refrain an would I, did I bring
Reason and will to bear against myself,
Did I but fly, as I have fled before,
Into the wilderness, to struggle there
In hungry loneliness against temptation.
O, would to God I ne'er had seen her face !

(Enter ATTILA AND EDECON. ADRIAN conceals
himself hastily.)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila. This much-bepraised, be-sung Constanti-
nople,

Is it as rich as we expected? Adrian,
The awesome anchorite of Syria, he,
Whose reason hath been touchéd by the
finger
Of that strange God he worships, told me
once

It is sublime in glory, sumptuous beauty,
Of such a strength from human arts and
nature

It can be held by smallest garrison
Against the strongest army ever took the
field.

And Rumour, though he hath a lying tongue,
Yet holdeth grains of truth within his heart.

Edecon. The city is of glorious beauty, far
Beyond the wildest dreams. Built on fair
slopes,

Her beauteous monuments, her towers and
walls

Command the waters of the Bosphorus,
The Euxine, and the deep land-locked Pro-
pontis.

GOD'S SCOURGE

She hath, moreover, harbourage for ships
Of countless numbers in the Golden Horn,
A broad, deep arm of the Propontis,
stretching

Far in the land. What siege can take this
city ?

Her walls, her altitude defy attack ;
And Famine hath no terrors for her people ;
Since food can be obtained from friendly
ships

Which laugh at hostile bands outside the
walls.

Attila. With such a stronghold, how comes it
about

Her Emperor and people are so timorous ?

Edecon. Men nourished in the shadow of great
walls

Forget to realise their true protection
Should lie entirely in their own proud
strength.

Brave, gallant troops are best and fittest
bulwark

To enclose a throne.

Attila. And is the city rich ?

GOD'S SCOURGE

Edecon. The very dome of her majestic temple
Is fretted and embossed with gleaming gold.

Attila (smiling). Then I did well to send
ambassadors

Whose acts are urged on by cupidity.
Brought you no largesse hither ?

Edecon (kneeling). With that matter
An evil tale is bound. This weighty purse
(producing it)

Is basest Roman bribe to Edecon
For your own priceless life.

Attila (calmly). Ha ! Say you so ?

Edecon. Vigilius, he was named to strike the
blow,

By my connivance. Craven Theodosius,
His sister, all the Empire of the East,
Are crouched beneath the yoke of Chrysa-
phius,

A mean and abject slave ; in his foul brain
This coward's crime, this treachery uprose.

Attila. This purse must be returned to him who
sent it.

But thou, good Edecon, shalt feel no loss.
Orestes, when he goes hence to demand

GOD'S SCOURGE

The justly-forfeit head of Chrysaphius,
Shall also ask for thee a Roman wife,
Who brings thee riches with her person.

Adrian (half coming forward). Hazard

Thus marks for me a path to my fixed goal.
Ildica, thou shalt be the wife demanded,
But not unto thy destined husband's arms
Shalt thou arrive. *(He advances.)*

*Attila (seeing ADRIAN). Most welcome, holy
man.*

I yearned to see thee. Leave us, Edecon.

(Exit EDECON.)

(To ADRIAN). How fares the star of Attila ?

Adrian. The voice

Of wailing Warning speaketh through my lips.

Attila. What meanest thou ?

Adrian. The news I have to impart

Occasion gives for this my presence here.
Your long unbroken course of victory
Approacheth to an end. Await, O king,
A cold, unlovely change.

Attila. What words are these ?

What can arrest the conquering course of
Attila,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Whom you yourself did name the "Scourge
of God"?

The Roman world now trembles at his step;
For Attila in battle is a spectre,
His skin empastled with the crimson soil
By Roman blood encarmined. What strong
arm

Amidst the enfeebled Romans can arrest
His chosen course?

Adrian. Constantinople boasts

A warrior's head and arm in valiant Marcian.
The day of Theodosius wanes apace.
Dread thou, O king, the stern and able man
Whom Providence hath marked for his suc-
cessor.

Now fades the brilliant star of thy success;
Seek thou to furbish up its dimming lustre.

Attila. But tell me how.

Adrian (aside). Repentance still is mine;
For I have yet the time to stay my hand.
And is it worth that I should damn my soul
For that poor fragment of soft-tinted flesh,
Give up the hope of blessed Eternity
For Ecstacy's short-lived, uneasy hour?

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila (aside). Sunk in his rapt, prophetic reverie,
He hears me not. (*Aloud*). But point me out
a way,

And I will sacrifice to reach its haven
What I hold dearest, even to the life
Of Ernac, best beloved of all my sons.

Adrian (hurriedly). There lives a maiden at Con-
stantinople,

Whose destiny is close bound up with thine,
And rules it both for fortune and mis-
chance.

Demand her as a wife for Edecon.

When she is yours, give him a richer wife,
And keep her as your safety at your side,
Till this short trial be passed. When I can
see

Prosperity again spread her furled wings
To shade your favoured head, you will no
longer

Require her presence, which may then acquire
An influence as harmful as now good.

Then can you send her to her family,
Or give her to the man who needs her most
For his own weal. Ildica is her name.

GOD'S SCOURGE

She is the daughter of rich Thracian Priscus
Who sojourns with you now, the ambassador,
A goodly man—O sainted Virgin, aid me!—
Most doting father, and the generous friend
Of that unhappy wretch whose curséd hand
Now stabs his heart!

Attila (aside). He writhes in holy strife.

Our augurs do not touch these Christian
prophets

Both in intensity and deepest issue
Of their strange ravings. I will leave him
now.

'Tis ominous to watch a prophet's frenzy
While he communeth with his God. (*Exit.*)

Adrian. 'Tis done.

And I am launched upon that gloomy sea
Whose source and mouth lie in the burning
bounds

Where sinners meet with punishment de-
served.

I have thee now, Ildica; I have lost
My soul in gaining thee. The price is great;
I will demand in full the recompense.

(*Exit.*)

GOD'S SCOURGE

SCENE III.—*Banquet Room in ATTILA's Palace.*

In the centre is a raised, square platform, ascended by several steps ; on this is ATTILA, reclining on a couch, ERNAC standing by his side, before him a small table plainly set out. An ancient iron scimitar, large and heavy, is suspended over his head. To the right the Scythians feast from gold and silver at small tables spread with fine linen (Roman spoil). Similar tables are set out on the left for the Roman legation. Two Scythian bards are seated on the steps of the dais, with rude harps in their hands. Two buffoons, one a Moor, the other a Hun, go amongst the guests playing their pranks to the amusement of all but ATTILA, who remains grave and thoughtful.

(Enter PRISCUS, VIGILIUS, and VALENS with their Roman train.)

Attila (rising). A hearty welcome, Romans, to our feast.

*Custom requireth that the stranger guest
Should quaff a potent goblet to our Deity,*

GOD'S SCOURGE

The God of War, to us a presence visible
In Mars' great iron sword (*points to the sword above his head*), put in our hands
By Heaven's connivance.

Vigilius (*to PRISCUS*). Are we, Christian men,
To drink to pagan deity?

Priscus (*to VIGILIUS*). It seems so ;
What wrong to us? No choice ours but
obedience.

(*Scythian boys bring goblets of wine to the Romans. They drink, PRISCUS pouring a libation on the floor.*)

(*To ATTILA*). We drink to thee, great king,
and to thy God.

Attila. The seats of honour, on the right, are held
Alone by friends dear to the heart of Attila.
No honoured guest may tamper with their
claim :

Hence, Romans, seat ye on the lesser left.

Vigilius (*to VALENS*). A foreign embassy in
aught respected

Should e'er be seated in the post of honour.

Valens. Nay, father, surely in this shows the
king

GOD'S SCOURGE

Full justice ; for a meritorious friend
Should be debased on no occasion.

(*ATTILA again reclines on his couch. The Romans seat themselves. The buffoons circulate among the guests.*)

Priscus (*to VIGILIUS*). See,

How doth the aspect of this savage king
Grow soft and loving as he bends his eye
Upon his youthful son ! This partial love
I hear hath growth in some ambitious hope
Concerning this bright boy. See how he holds
The child betwixt his knees, and his round
cheek

So gently pincheth ! Wonderful indeed
Is that paternal fondness on a face
Of so severe and stern a majesty.

Attila. Fill up the goblets brimful ; heap the
platters.

Rise, *Eslam* (*to the bard*) ; let us hear thy
welcome strains.

Eslam. (*rising and reciting to harp accompaniment :—*)

In far Asia's east recesses lay the cradle of
that race,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Whose great conquests, past and present,
altered Empire's shifting face.

North they dwelt of peaceful China, on whose
riches soon did drift
The longing eyes of those brave shepherds,
who erstwhile had lived with thrift.

Then the Chinese, in their terror, raised a
mighty, lasting wall,
To exclude the Hunnish shepherds, lest to
them their wealth should fall.

Who can stem swift, gathering waters ? Who
can stay the locusts' pace ?

Those brave Huns made light of barriers ;
they soon scaled the wall's rough face ;
And they gained a glorious victory over
China's myriad race.

They defeat the great Kaoli, on him shameful
peace impose ;

Then pursue fresh paths of conquest. Thus
the Huns' first Empire rose.

They subdue the Scythian races, which, till
then in peaceful bands,
As their brethren wandered with them over
Asia's grass-grown lands.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Lo ! Behold ! A cloud upriseth, which
obscures their glory's sun ;
China, fretted by her tribute, checks the
freedom of the Hun !
Then the Huns migrate due westward ; west,
and ever westward go,
Till they reach the widespread Caspian,
where dividing waters flow.
Turn they southward, pass the mountains,
cross Mœotis' shallow tide,
Guided to a ford of safety by the bull's
unerring stride.
In the reign of crafty Valens, ruling Rome's
most eastern parts,
Shocked the Huns first, by their aspect,
trembling, sinking Roman hearts.
(*The Scythians murmur applause, and twang
their bowstrings.*)
Then commenced their second Empire, which,
with pride now claims a king (*indicating*
ATTILA),
Offspring of the Huns of China, to whom
Romans tribute bring. (*Smiling, indica-
ting the ambassadors.*)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Now on Attila's firm shoulders rests the burden of a realm,

Which must needs decay and loosen, should his hand release the helm.

(*To Attila*). Mighty warrior, wisest ruler, blessed with victor's head and hand, Magic's yet more potent power makes thee foremost in the land !

(*To the Huns*). Happy Huns ! your favoured nation gives the Scythian hordes a king, Attila, the god-like sovereign, him whose praise the nations sing ! (*Throws up his arms wildly*.)

Huns (twanging their bowstrings). Oh, Attila ! Great Attila !

Attila. Thanks, Eslam.

Come, Rona, we await a stirring lay.

(*ESLAM seats himself. RONA rises ; the Scythians fill anew the goblets and drinking horns*.)

Rona (sings, stretching out his hands to the iron sword). Hail to thee, God of War !

Scythians (rising in great excitement, brandishing their spears at the sword). Hail to thee, God of War !

GOD'S SCOURGE

Rona. What can equal War's delight,
Her frenzy, ecstasy ?
War provides to men of might
Best theme for minstrelsy !

Bards of other lands may sing
That Love bears off the palm (*shakes his head*).
Love's small lay gives feeble ring
Against War's mighty psalm !

Scythians. Against War's mighty psalm !

Rona. Hail to thee, God of War !

Scythians (*clashing their swords and shields, and twanging their bowstrings*). Hail to thee, God of War !

Rona (*addressing the Huns*). Elders, weep, your failing strength

Removes you from the field ;

Old Men (*sadly*). Removes us from the field ;

Rona. Young men, joy ; your lives' short length
War's ecstasy can yield !

Young Men (*jubilant*). War's ecstasy can yield !

Rona. You still reeking swords can wave
Deep stained with crimson blood.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Swords undyed, boys, quickly lave
In War's all-glorious flood !

Ernac and Boys. In War's all-glorious flood !

Rona. Mars 'mongst us has taken root

In his victorious sword (*Pointing to the sword*),

Which the heifer's bleeding foot
Showed buried by its lord.

When the finders deftly draw
The weapon from the sod,
Attila, by instinct's law,
This symbol of our God (*points to the sword*)
Proclaims it Sword of Mars !

Scythians. Proclaims it Sword of Mars !

Rona (excitedly). Hail to thee, God of War !

Scythians (frenzied with excitement, clashing their shields and shaking their spears). Hail
to thee, God of War !

(*VIGILIUS rises, a dagger concealed in his hand, and approaches ATTILA, closely watched by EDECON.*)

Vigilius (aside). The time is come. This opportune confusion

GOD'S SCOURGE

Favours my purpose and advanceth it.

Now hatred nerve my arm ! (*Aloud to ATTILA*). Accurséd tyrant,

A thing of hatred to all those who bear
The name of Roman, die !

(*He strikes at ATTILA ; his arm is caught by EDECON.*)

Edecon. Help ! Treason ! Treachery !

(*To VIGILIUS*). The sacred Attila thou dar'st
attack ?

Down with thee, Roman dog ! (*Hurls him to
the ground.*)

Vigilius (*to EDECON*). Thine is the treachery.

Thou art unfaithful to thine own accomplice.

Edecon. I'll tear out your vile, slanderous tongue !

Attila (*to EDECON*). Peace, friend ;

Allay thou rather than increase this tumult.

Why stand before me, Ernac ? Thinkest thou
Thy father's safety needs thy puny strength ?

(*To the Scythians*). My children, see, your
king is all unharmed.

Can you believe that he, who quite alone

Hath faced and turned a Roman legion, now
Requires your aid against a single arm ?

GOD'S SCOURGE

(*To the Romans*). O Romans, in this act of
treachery

Your abject weakness lies revealed. The
realm

Reflects the nature of the ruling head,
And Theodosius hereby shows the poverty
Which grows from impotence. Vigilius,
Behold the purse your Emperor's false slave
Sent hither to entrap my subject Edecon,
That he might aid your sly, nefarious deed.

Your Theodosius is unworthy son
Of an Imperial and illustrious parent.

A kingly race hath also fathered me,
And I (as Theodosius cannot boast)
By all my actions have upheld in full
The seemly dignity my father Mundzuk
Gave me for patrimony. Theodosius
Hath forfeited paternal honours, in that,
Consenting to pay tribute, to a slave
Himself he hath degraded. Just is it
He, therefore, should revere the man whom
Fate,

Whom merit hath placed over him ; instead
Conspires he like a slave, clandestinely

GOD'S SCOURGE

To slay his master, taking piteous refuge
In base assassin's stealthy steel. Orestes,
Speed to Constantinople; hang this purse,
This damning evidence, about thy neck;
Confront the trembling Emperor of the East,
In dastard act detected. Noble Priscus,
Whose brow bears his shamed horror of
this deed,

He leaves with thee and all his train, unhurt,
Rewarded with rich gifts from Attila.
And thou, Vigilius, traitor as thou art,
I scorn to slay thee. Hence at once depart.
Return safe to your master, in your face
To read his sore humiliation. But,
As thy foul treachery needs punishment,
I take possession of thine only son.
Here he remains with me.

Vigilius (throwing himself at the king's feet).

O Attila,
Lay not upon the son the punishment
The father hath incurred. My life is yours.
Lay not the burden of captivity
Upon a youth whose opening life craves
mercy.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Valens (*to VIGILIUS, raising him to his feet*). It
is the dutious offspring's joyful lot
To bear an honoured parent's wretchedness.
Captivey among barbarian hordes
Is cheapest purchase of thy priceless life.

Vigilius (*clasping VALENS in his arms*). My son !
My curséd deed hath found me out !

Priscus. This day of horror is a fitting climax
To our most shameful embassy. The knell
Of Roman pride is rung ! I little thought
The Roman eagle could have bowed so low,
Its crest, once haughtily erect, so humbled,
Its brilliancy effacéd in the dust !
The Roman Empire hath near done the work
For which she grew. Her worldly influence
Now waxeth less ; when it doth wholly cease
Then will she die outright, exhaustion's death;
For it is one of Nature's sternest laws,
That what hath no use must not idly cumber,
But must sink out of sight with its last spark
Of acting energy.

Attila. Rome's days are numbered.

(*To the Scythians*.) Remove the Romans, all
save Syrian Valens ;

GOD'S SCOURGE

No longer Roman, he henceforth adopts
A Scythian's dress and customs.

Vigilius. O my son !

Valens. Most honoured father, fare thee well.

Farewell

To you, good Priscus.

Priscus. Noble youth, farewell.

(*Despairingly.*) The culmination of my sore
distress

Is reached.

Valens (to PRISCUS). My dearest love to your
fair daughter.

O my Ildica, my betrothéd bride,
On thy sweet face no more will mine eyes
feast !

Ah ! bitter woe !

(*Veils his head in his mantle. Exeunt PRISCUS
and VIGILIUS, escorted by ORESTES and
Scythians.*)

Hunnish Chiefs (laughing and pointing at
VALENS). Behold the valiant Roman !

He weepeth like a timid, lonesome woman !

END OF ACT II.

ACT III

SCENE I.—Interior of the Cathedral of St. Sophia, Constantinople. To the left commences the choir and splendid screen which divides off the sanctuary and altar. The walls are richly decorated with Byzantine paintings on gold ground. Sacred images occupy every available niche, with a profusion of tapers burning before them.

(PRISCUS AND ANATOLIUS discovered, with CHRYSAPHIUS, who is muffled in a cloak.)

Chrysaphius (to ANATOLIUS). Canst thou do nothing for me, Anatolius?

The brutal rabble cry out for my life,
And I have no protection 'gainst their fury.
I've stolen from my kindly master's corse
To pray your aid. Here grant me sanctuary.

Anatolius. It is impossible, my son. The breath
Had scarce departed from the Emperor's body,

GOD'S SCOURGE

When the whole populace with one accord
Proclaimed Pulcheria most fit successor
To her dead brother's throne. She is thine
enemy.

She is inclined to hear the people's cries,
And yield thee up, a right unwilling sacrifice,
Unto their discontent. She hither wends
To pray for strength to carry out the tasks
Her crown imposeth. Here she must not
find thee,

Or it will go most hard with thee.

Chrysaphius. O Death !

Thou hast reft from me the one Roman heart
Which loved and sheltered me !

Priscus. The insulting message

Your treachery brought down from Attila
Upon the shame-bowed head of Theodosius
Is truest cause of your distress.

Anatolius. Nay, Priscus,

Add not reproach to keen anxiety's load.

Priscus. The fount of pity in me is dried up.

When I think on the fate of gentle Valens,
Who bears the brunt of this man's abject guilt
Upon his shoulders.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Chrysaphius. Priscus, you are wrong,

The sainted Emperor died not of shame.

He died because he condescended to pursue
A vulgar sport, beneath the dignity
Of God's elect.

Priscus (angrily). You are a sorry slave,

To thus decry the one poor claim to man-
hood

Your false up-bringing left within his breast !
His love for hunting is much to his credit.
'Tis certain that the sting of shame benumbed
His sick attention, and so veiled his eyes,
He rode less gallantly than he was wont ;
His horse, held with less mastery, grew lax,
Till fatal stumble laid his rider low,
With but an hour's life left in him.

Anatolius (to CHYSAPHIUS). Your life

Can best be purchased by a secret flight.

The Golden Horn holds many rapid ships.

With such a bribe as your collected wealth
Can offer, one of these will surely bear you
Away from this hot city, to await
A better day.

Chrysaphius. Your kindly words contain

GOD'S SCOURGE

A present solace and the germ of hope.

I go. Your blessing on a fugitive.

(*He kneels. ANATOLIUS stretches his hands over his head. Exit CHRYSAPHIUS.*)

Anatolius. This change will have a mighty influence

Upon the Empire of the East. Pulcheria
Will hold more firmness in her policy
Than Theodosius ever dreamed on.

Priscus. Ay.

Pulcheria hath lost no time in taking
Strong measures for the safety of her realm.
Honoria, luckless princess, she despatched
Without delay back to her brother's care.

Anatolius. Went not your daughter with her ?

Priscus. Yes. In truth

I was grown somewhat fearful for the safety
Of my ewe-lamb. You know that Attila
Demanded her as wife for Edecon ?
Pulcheria (ever honoured be her name !)
Refused to grant what, weakly, Theodosius
Inclined to yield. But as this fierce, wild
Hun

Scorns obstacles, and is quite capable

GOD'S SCOURGE

Of battering our walls about our ears,
I sent my daughter with a trusted friend
To swell Honoria's train, with her arrive
At safe Ravenna, circled by deep marshes;
There Valentinian hath a refuge sought
From the inpouring torrent of barbarian hordes.
I'll say no more, for here is Adrian.

(Enter ADRIAN, gazing moodily at the pavement.)

Poor wretch! I'll not excite him. Solitude,
Religious fears, have eaten up what reason
His mother gave him grudgingly at birth.

Anatolius. Abstracted phantom more than living
man,

He natheless can be stirred to violence
By causes most inadequate.

Priscus. He chose

To strenuously oppose my daughter's going—
Predicted divers sorts of ill for her,
Should she desert this city. A strange fancy
E'en held me that he mortally resented
Pulcheria's most generous defence.

Adrian (aside). Curse those officious, intermeddling fools,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Whose actions have unravelled my contrivance !

Ildica verily is lost to me,
Unless an intercepting Providence
Restore her. Why not ? Such chance yet
may fall.

Bewildering indeed are Fortune's means ;
The very incident we wail as ruin
May finally shine forth our chiefest friend.

(*Trumpets sound without. Enter from choir
a procession of deacons and sub-deacons
bearing aloft sacred banners and images,
preceded by acolytes swinging censers.*)

*Enter from right PULCHERIA, dressed
in regal robes, with CLAUDIA, MARCIAN,
and train of Senators, soldiers, attendants, &c.)*

Pulcheria. The nun's slow foot, accustomed to
this pavement,

Now presseth it anew with regal tread.

Hard destiny ! The cloister's wholesome peace
Is ill replaced with weary, garish pomp,
The clashing swirl of Rome's Imperial state,
Encompassed with its train of anxious fears,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Its wonted bodyguard. My weakly flesh
Longs to refuse the cares the people's voice
Bade me take up with this unwished-for crown.

Anatolius. Most gracious Empress, deign to hear
a word

Which Holy Church speaks to the Empire's
head.

Much instant need hath your once mighty
realm

Of able martial leader, to beat back
Her surging enemies. For Rome's true weal
Take to yourself a husband.

Pulcheria. I, a husband,

I, consecrated from my earliest youth
To Heaven's service ! Shall I in mine age
Give up my virgin purity, which lacking,
I am no fit associate for saints,
No favoured candidate for heavenly crown ?

Anatolius. Celibacy is needful for the purity
Of men and women who have quite re-
nounced

The vanities and passions of this life ;
Yet matrimony is unquestionably
Best state for crownéd head.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Priscus. Beseech you, madam,
List to your counsellors.

Pulcheria. They ask too much.
I cannot enter seeingly a state
My soul abhorreth.

Populace (without). Down with Chrysaphius !

Claudia. Great Princess, list to these dread cries ;
restore

Much needed peace to your distracted Empire.

Priscus. Place, madam, at the head of your affairs
A man of virtue, who takes them by right.
Let them not fall into illegal clutch,
To some mean villain like the luckless
wretch
The just infuriated populace
Now hunteth to his doom.

Pulcheria. Is there a man,
In whom the patriot will efface the husband.
Who will accept with the Imperial crown
The task of our defence, and, ratified
Within his place by poor Pulcheria's hand,
Respect her person ?

Populace (without). Down with Chrysaphius !

Claudia. Ay, surely ; patriotism is not dead.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Pulcheria. Wise, Marcian, wilt thou take this heavy
crown,

Be equal Emperor, my counsellor,

My greatest general, my trusted friend ?

Priscus (to PULCHERIA). A wise selection, O thou
able sovereign !

It is a goodly choice. If Western Rome
Can boast her *Ætius*, Eastern Rome rejoices
In equal Marcian.

Anatolius. Yea. Our valued Marcian
Is orthodox and virtuous as he is brave.

Marcian. The kindly generosity of friends
Ascribes too much to Marcian's humble gifts.
(*To PULCHERIA, kneeling.*) Great Empress,
I lay down my life with pride

At your throne's foot, to be entirely used
For Rome's best service.

Pulcheria. In a serious crisis,
As now sweeps o'er the Empire of the East,
All private sentiments—mortification,
Pride, vain ambition, love—they all must yield
To purer motives, energetic efforts.

Anatolius. Let us cement this saving union now ;
I gladly lend my aid.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Pulcheria (to MARCIAN, raising him). As Emperor,

Shall thy wise head, my counsellor, dictate,
Thy hand dispatch a missive to the Hun,
To promise his insults complete return.

(Enter VIGILIUS.)

(To VIGILIUS). Why this disordered haste,
Vigilius ?

Have other fateful blows been harshly dealt
us ?

Vigilius. I bow beneath the weight of evil tid-
ings ;

But they concern thee, Empress, but as kings
Must share the pangs which rend a subject's
heart.

Alack ! that I must say it ! For I feel
Unworthy deed of mine, not to be expiated
E'en by the woful loss it laid on me,
Hath helped to fashion this most mournful
coil
Of circumstances.

Priscus. A prophetic fear
Lifts up my hair and clots my blood with
horror.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Vigilius. O Priscus ! On thy neck the sharp sword
falls !

Priscus. My daughter ! light of mine approaching
age !

Hath aught befallen my daughter ?

Vigilius. Three brave ships
Left with good auspices the Golden Horn.
They traversed the Propontis, safely passed
The Hellespont's approaching shores, with
skill

Steered sinuous course amidst the verdant isles
Which fairly dot the thronged *Ægean* sea.
Peloponnesus was next ably rounded,
The pilot placing careful space betwixt
The leaf's far-spreading points and his frail
charge.

Arrived in the Ionian Sea, all danger
He counted past. Ah me ! The worst mis-
fortunes

Come ever from an unexpected source !
Here were they harassed by fierce Northern
pirates,
Whose galleys, with a rare effrontery,
Had pierced the guarding Gate of Hercules.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Pulcheria. So close to friends, was succour not sent forth ?

Vigilius. The strife was short, because the Roman ships,

Oppressed by numbers, tried a saving flight,
Their purposed refuge Adriatic's haven,
Wherein the Norsemen dared not follow them.
Two ships escaped . . . the third . . .

Priscus. What of the third ?

Pulcheria. What of the third ?

Vigilius. Sore injured in the press,

It drifted helplessly ; the Ocean's tide
Dashed it upon Epirus' rocky shore.

Anatolius. The crew was saved—— ?

Vigilius. —— But from the water's greed.

A foe more terrible than that they shunned
Swooped suddenly upon them from Naissus.
The Huns have seized them, and have borne
them, captives,

Unto the village of the Scythian king.

Priscus. My daughter, man, my cherished only child ?

Vigilius. My tongue refuses to pronounce the words,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Whose cruel utterance substantiates
A shadowed fear.

Priscus. O bitter stroke ! My daughter !
My fair sweet flower is reft from me !

Adrian (aside). The Lord
Delivers this man's child into my hand !
He smiles upon me ; by His present act
He gives approval.

Pulcheria (to PRISCUS). Grieve not thus, good
friend,

And wipe these drops from off thy manly
cheek.

Firm and decisive measures shall soon bring
Thy lovely child back to thine empty arms,
As they shall rescue Valens from the Huns.

Anatolius. We will at once perform the cere-
mony

Which gives the noble Marcian's skilful aid
To check and remedy these growing wrongs.

*(Exeunt all but ADRIAN to the left, towards
the sanctuary).*

Adrian (jubilant). Celestial forces have thus
worked for me !

I have but to go forth and take my prize.

GOD'S SCOURGE

(*Checking himself*). But Valens sojourns with
the Huns ! 'Twas I,

Distrusting the ability of Providence,
Who blindly, foolishly brought that about.
And Attila hath taken to the youth,
Loads him with benefits, reveres his words.

Should Valens lay a counter claim to mine !

(*Without are sounded trumpet blasts, mixing
with a solemn chant played softly on the
organ.*)

Adrian. I have o'erreached myself. A twofold
plan

Hath tangled and exhausted its prime object
In meshes of its own elaboration.

It hath been said that subtle wisdom's fore-
thought

Will e'er provide a second means of transit,
Lest its first path to full success be blocked.
Yet such arrangement hath its disadvantage.
My schemes, good in their way, destroy each
other.

In crossing, they provide two obstacles,
Each great as that which first I strained to
shift.

GOD'S SCOURGE

(A loud roar heard without.)

Good cause have I to know that savage
yell,
And what it bodes for him who calls it
forth.

The ravening wolves have seized the crippled
stag,

And Chrysaphius, yielded to their rage,
Approacheth to a fearful end.

Populace (without). Wood ! Lights !

Death to the base extortioner ! More wood !
A torch here ! Burn him ! To the stake !
To the stake !

(Another loud roar.)

Adrian. Thou art doomed, poor wretch !

*(Enter from the right CHYSAPHIUS, closely
pursued by the populace, who carry torches
and faggots.)*

Chrysaphius. Help ! Help, in Christ's sweet
name !

Sophia, gracious saint, protect me !

(He crouches on the ground.)

A Voice from the Crowd. Let him not
Attain the altar, and thus balk revenge.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Adrian (standing over the prostrate body of CHYSAPHIUS). Hold ! Stay your impious hands ! Touch not the man !

He hath a sanctuary found within these walls ;

God and Sophia stretch their hands above him.

Citizen. No interference, Adrian, or perchance An equal fate will meet you.

Adrian. What Hell's plot

Hatch ye against him ?

Populace (raging). Death to Chrysaphius !

Citizen. Peace, mates, and let me speak.

(To ADRIAN). If you must know,
We carry him without the Golden Gate,
Where purpose we to make of him a bon-
fire,

In honour of this new auspicious reign ;
Whereby we wipe out Hatred's lengthy
score,

And offer up oblation to our saint
For violation of her sanctuary.

(*The people laugh and jeer.*)

Chrysaphius (clutching at ADRIAN). Help ! Help !

GOD'S SCOURGE

Good Adrian, help ! Where is the Empress ?

She would not yield me up to such a death !

Adrian. Help ! Great Augusta, help !

(To CHYSAPHIUS). Mine enemy,

I will ward off from thee at any risk

The death you tried to deal me.

(*Stands between him and the crowd, and calls towards the choir.*)

Are ye deaf there ?

Help ! Help !

(*The music without swells louder and louder.*)

Citizen. Quick, mates, or we shall lose our prey.

(*The populace, laughing, snatch at CHYSAPHIUS, and bear him off shrieking.*)

Chrysaphius. Help ! Help !

Adrian. Help ! Help !

Populace. More wood ! More lights there ! To the stake ! (Exeunt.)

Priests (chanting without). Now Peace, with Good Fellowship,

Reigneth among men.

Thanks be to God for His great mercy !

GOD'S SCOURGE

SCENE II.—*The Plains of Dacia between the Danube and Tibiscus; in the distance the Carpathian Mountains; to the left are the outskirts of ATTILA'S Royal Village, where a camp fire is burning.*

VALENS, EDECON, and ERNAC discovered,
VALENS kneeling by the fire, a wooden bowl
in his hand; the other two looking on with
interest.

Edecon. Most wonderful!

Ernac. Do it again, good Roman!

(*VALENS throws a pinch of gunpowder from the bowl into the fire; it explodes.*)

The wondrous, talking powder! In its pain
It roareth out when bitten by the fire!

Edecon. And sayest thou, Roman, that no magic
art

Compounds this powder?

Valens. Not one jot of magic.

I have no dealings with the nether world,
And lay no claim to powers possessed by
gods.

Close observation of kind Nature's products

GOD'S SCOURGE

Instructs a man of their utility,
Unless he useth merely outward vision.
Can he discover what prime elements
Produceth them, he then at once perceives
How far the whole, in nature, look and use,
May haply differ from component parts.
He then a step advanceth ; by wise blending
A many substances, made to his hand,
He can in time, with labour, introduce
Strange combinations, never found in Nature,
Yet which meet with her fast-increasing
needs,
As ages roll along and bring in course
A thousand objects, hopes, necessities
Unknown to men in times more primitive.

Edecon. I would I had your magic. Let me try
If I can wake the echoes. (*Seizes the bowl.*)
Valens (*starting to his feet*). Stay, rash man !
You know not what you play with ! Fire
enough
Of this grey powder and you blow yourself
Into the air, dissolved into the elements
Which form your substance ; or you level
walls,

GOD'S SCOURGE

The thickest, highest towers ; or send death
missiles

A hundred times the distance and velocity
The stoutest arm can compass.

(*ATTILA enters slowly, moody and fierce,
unnoticed by VALENS and EDECON.
ATTILA repulses ERNAC, who runs joy-
ously to him.*)

Attila. Is that so ?

It should be useful in besieging towns.

Thou marvellous young Roman ! I have
noted

Thy strangest powers, thine occult occupations.
I do recall me that an ancient bard
Did pour into my infant ears a tale
Which strangely meets this case. He said the
Chinese,

When at their glory's zenith, did possess
By magic's aid a fire intense and terrible,
By which they carried conquest o'er the
earth.

Edecon. Anew young Valens hath this fire com-
pounded

From such slight, impotent ingredients

GOD'S SCOURGE

As that grey saline humour which exudes
From out the earth, and forms on it a crust.

Attila (*to VALENS*). Thou art a great magician, to
produce

Such dreadful force from harmless substances.

Valens. The only mystic power I can claim
Is that which makes my worthless self
appear

Attractive to the lady of my heart.

O king, we both are captives in your hands ;
But in a royal mood you lately hinted
We should be soon released.

(*ATTILA stands silent and frowning.*)

Edecon (*aside to VALENS*). Enrage him not
With words not opportune.

Attila (*fiercely*). My mood is changed ;
My heart which softened lately to the Romans
Is now to them a rock. From East and West
Come insolent objections, curt replies.

(*To VALENS*). Your Marcian now refuses
further tribute,

And offers paltry sum for our alliance,
Our military service in the East.

And Valentinian, he to whom we sent,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Demanding as our bride Honoria
(Who pledged herself to us by this same
ring),

(Holding up his hand.)

Declines to yield her, and has married her
To obscure soldier in his puny legions !

Valens. The captive lady hath no share or hand
In these your disappointments, nor have I.

Attila. But you may both be of utility ;
And at such pass resources must be garnered.

Valens (aside). What service can Ildica grant to
him ?

Have her rare beauty, grace and modesty
Pleased his rude eye and touched his untamed
heart ?

O hateful weed, Suspicion, in my breast
Thou hast shot up to choke the seeds of
Hope ! *(Exit slowly.)*

Attila (to EDECON). Go ; find me Scotta and
remove the boy.

(Exeunt EDECON and ERNAC.)

What Alaric the Visigoth hath done,
What Genseric, mine own ally, encompassed,
Is surely not beyond the aims of Attila ?

GOD'S SCOURGE

Why should not Rome be my deserved
prize ?

Success lies to the West, not in the East,
Which I have fully ravished of her wealth.

I might first make for Gaul, by strategy
Feign to bear arms against Theodoric,
Whilst I work secretly for his good will.

(Enter SCOTTA with three mutton bones in
his hand.)

(To SCOTTA). Hast thou communéd with the
Unseen Powers ?

Assist they my projected enterprise ?

Scotta. Still all is dark to me. The beasts' fresh
entrails

No certain answer yield my searching gaze.

Another peep into futurity

Is yet ours by the action of the fire
Upon these bones. Look keenly on them,
Attila.

(Gives him the bones.)

Let anxious search pass from your fixéd eye
Into their substance, to assist the flames.

(ATTILA gazes at them and returns them
to SCOTTA, who throws them on the fire.)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Scotta (addressing the fire). O God of War, vouchsafe to hear my prayer !

Let not the bones be dumb and mock my search.

Control thine element to do its work
So fairly that it brings thine answer to me.
Thou worshipped, pampered deity, the object
Of truest love in every Hunnish heart,
Oh, bend a kindly eye upon thy sons ;
Send favourable answer to their prayer,
And promise to our enterprise success.

Attila (to the fire). If thou wilt smile and bless
my path of war,

Upon thine altar, Mars, I swear to pour
The drenching blood of full five hundred
slaves,

A fitting feast for thy keen appetite.

Both. Oh, glorious Mars, grant favourable answer !
(SCOTTA removes the bones from the fire and
looks at them closely.)

Attila. What see you there ?

Scotta (excitedly). The bones are scorched and rent !
I see a bloody battle fought in Gaul,
Wherein the Huns must suffer long and sore !

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila (*anxiously*). Theodoric and his six warrior
sons,

Do they fight for me, or for *Ætius*?

Scotta. No knowledge of this gravest point can I
From these rents gather.

Attila. But tell me the issue.

Scotta. The greatest adversary falls in death.

Attila. The greatest! That is *Ætius*! Mighty
Mars!

Thou hast prepared for me a splendid triumph!
Thanks, *Scotta*, thanks; you read your book
right well.

I will depart at once, ere these bright omens
Have time to change their smiles to hurtful
frowns.

When my horn sounds let my most valiant
troops

Assemble on the plains to hear my words.

(*Exit.*)

Scotta (*gazing at the bones*). My mind doth much
misgive me; fearful slaughter
Do these rents augur. What if he (*pointing
towards ATTILA*) should fall,
And *Ætius* thus secure a victory? (*Exit.*)

GOD'S SCOURGE

(Enter ILDICA hurriedly, followed by
ADRIAN.)

Ildica. Fall back; I will not listen to you further.

Adrian. My love hath overflowed the brim of
Reason's cup,

So chide me not if I take best advantage
Of circumstances.

Ildica. You shall now desist,
Or I will call for aid. The noble Hun
Hath kept his helpless prisoner from insult,
And I could walk with all impunity,
Till you came hither. Shame upon you !
Shame !

The Christian Roman lacks the courtesy
Shown by barbaric pagans in their tents !

Adrian. Love me, Ildica. It is in your power
To change me throughly into what you will.
Young Valens needs you not; he loves his
books,
Is of a meditative, happy nature,
Which strives not with the harsh decrees of
Fate.

Your loss will not destroy him; he hath
much.

GOD'S SCOURGE

But I, what have I ? Nothing but despair,
The sharp remembrance of a wasted life !

Ildica (gently). Be calm. This frenzied passion
for Ildica

Is but an impulse of the sore distemper
You have let creep into your inmost being.
Not I can cure you, but yourself alone.
Go, nourish your spent frame with whole-
some food.

The body must be doctored ere the brain
Recover normal health and level vision.
Can you indeed think that our blessed Lord
Gave you your body to neglect and wound,
Prepared your intellect to waste and rot ?
A wise king will require great deeds, not
words

From those who serve him ; shall we then
abase

The King of Kings below a reigning man ?
What merit in God's ears have your wild
prayers,

When He hath made you to perform His work ?
You were not born unto your chosen lot.
I know that well.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Adrian (gloomily). But you can never know
What strangest, dreadest impulses within
Drove me first from the world.

Ildica. You were a boy,
The merest child. And see the fruits of
flight !
The dreadful thoughts which frightened thee,
the shepherd,
Who spent long days and nights alone with
flocks,
Had found no place in healthy, happy lad,
His father's hope, his loving mother's joy.

Adrian. Would that some cheering voice had
checked the fears,

Which agonised the wild, bewildered child !

Ildica. Those men intended to work out God's
purpose
Have strangest mixtures in their complex
natures,
The stranger if born out of time and place.
To be a man of action wert thou born !
The thoughts and impulses you took for
snares
Were but the outbursts of vitality

GOD'S SCOURGE

Repressed too far. 'Tis mournful to reflect
What priceless gifts may not the Roman world
Have lost in thee, and such as thou, who fill
The Theban desert with their groans and
wails.

The omnipotence of will, which held thee
chained,

In needless misery, while joy lay by,
The courage and the hardihood which scoffed
At hunger's trials, the beating of the
elements,

Might have secured to Rome a warrior hero
Whose might would have upheld her 'gainst
all foes,

Were each as hardy and as brave as Attila.

Adrian. Speak on ! Mine ears could drink your
words for ever ;

They echo like a trumpet through my soul.

(Throwing up his arms deliriously.)

To be a man of action I was born !

(Hurriedly). But that restrained energy you
praise

Shall yet bear fruit. It will revive, Ildica.

In your companionship I could forget

GOD'S SCOURGE

What I have grown, and could in place
become

What I was born for. Do not cast me off !
You are the complement of mine existence,
Possessor of the faculties I lack.

Your heart is so far in accord with mine,
You deep can probe my nature, scan my woes,
Reduce them to their petty origin.

Ildica. Ah ! Adrian, in no wise gives that fact
proof

Of special link between your heart and mine.
A kindly feeling towards our fellow men
Breeds gentle tact in every human being.
Tact is that dainty, wondrous sensitiveness
Enables men to probe each other lightly,
See with the eyes, feel with the hearts of others,
And thus learn to avoid unconscious stabs,
To impart much needed consolation, or
Suggest best remedies for slips and pains.

Adrian. Ildica, dearest vision of my soul,
Thou camest as cooling draught to my
parched lips.

Had I but known thee in my earlier years,
I had been moulded different. Lacking thee,

GOD'S SCOURGE

I am but lost ; I tell thee, I am lost !

Wilt thou not seek to save a falling soul ?

Ildica. I cannot thus. I should do heavy wrong
Unto myself, my father, unto Valens
Whom I alone can love.

Adrian. He loves thee not.

He loves his selfish studies more than thee.

Ildica. And right it is (if it be so) that Valens
Should give his first best thoughts to his
life's work.

No man could win a spark of love from me
Who wastes his life in sickly sentiment.

Love is the soother, not the aim of life.

Adrian. Hath Priscus by his training but in-
creased

Thy mental vision at thy heart's expense ?

Can maiden count demerit in her lover
Excess of love ?

Ildica (turning away). I loathe extremes.

(Enter VALENS.)

Valens (to ILDICA). Brave Attila

Hath trusted your safe-keeping to mine
honour,

While he is absent. Should he fall in battle,

GOD'S SCOURGE

He hath laid on his lieutenants command
That you and I, the pair of us, be sent
Under safe conduct to Constantinople.

Ildica. All honour to this great, barbarian king,
Who shows by instinct strength's nobility !

Adrian (aside). I primed him not with proper
disposition

Of this choice treasure should he fall.—The
horn !

(A horn is heard.)

Ildica. What means that call ?

Valens. The signal of the King !

*(Barbaric march played. Enter in detach-
ments from all sides Scythians in war
array. Enter ATTILA, fully armed,
preceded by ORESTES and EDECON bear-
ing the sword of Mars.)*

Attila. Oh, children, claim I now your fixed
attention.

A dangerous but glorious enterprise
Lies straight before us ; its inviting path
Is pointed out to us by beckoning shades
Of those past mighty deeds with which my
warriors

GOD'S SCOURGE

Are gloriously adorned. For energy
Some spur is needed ; and what spur to war
Can equal that remembrance of past deeds
Which swells the heart and hurries on the
pace

In eagerness for equal joys again ?
Our danger will but offer us a step
Upwards to fame, for it will make us
desperate.

Once fairly on our way we must press on.
Retreat will be cut off by wily foes ;
We must press onwards unto victory,
Or find in hostile lands a warrior's grave.
But what is this consideration, children,
Compared to those high - beating, glorious
hopes

Which tell you to your arms hath Mars
reserved

The total conquest of proud Western Rome ?
That Fortune, which unto your valiant spears
Laid open Scythia's desert and morass,
And hurled so many nations at your feet,
The joy of this most memorable feat
She hath reserved as fitting culmination

GOD'S SCOURGE

Of glorious victories. The cautious steps,
The strict alliance, advantageous posts,
So craftily observed by Roman *Ætius*,
Are not results of prudence, but of fear.
Theodoric I hope to win for us ;
But should he join our enemies, alone
We need consider him, the force and nerve
Of all Rome's feeble army. You may trample
In all security upon the Romans,
A base, degenerated race of men,
Whose close and compact order in a battle
Betrays their apprehensions. Totally
Incapable are Romans of supporting
The great fatigue or dangers of long strife.
Our augurs now declare by happy omens
You, children, well protected by the heavens,
Shall be held safe, invulnerable, when
Amidst the hostile darts. Unerring Fate
Doth strike your victims in the sleepy bosom
Of Peace inglorious. I, Attila,
Will cast the first sharp javelin amongst them.
Then woe unto the poltroon who dare not
The example of his sovereign imitate !
Inevitable death shall be his portion.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Strike up, ye instruments of martial music !

*(The drums, pipes and horns are played, and
continue while ATTILA speaks.)*

Give added joy in war to the brave soldier ;

Force seeming heart into the backward
coward

(If Hunnish ranks enclose such filthy refuse).

To-morrow with the rising sun we march

Towards the west, to Gaul !

Scythians (shouting and waving their swords).

To Gaul ! To Gaul !

*(Women enter with refreshments, surrounded
by girls dancing and playing cymbals.
They serve the Scythians, the music swell-
ing louder and louder.)*

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV

SCENE I.—*Room in ATTILA's Palace in Dacia.*

To one side is a table with wine upon it in a silver flagon. Arms are scattered on the floor. At the back is a large open door, showing the landscape without.

(*ATTILA discovered.*)

Attila. Defeat ; retreat ; these are foul, loathsome words

Which fester the proud tongue forced to pronounce them.

I have been beaten by despised opponents.

O hateful memory ! Distracting thought !

This backward step must be at once retrieved.

What course to take ? My head is dull and troubled ;

Its sick confusion weighs upon my acts,

And robs me of all energy to plan.

Wine ! Give me wine ! I must dispel this lethargy (*snatches up the flagon*).

GOD'S SCOURGE

Thou liquid treacherous, but direst need
Compels me to accept thy doubtful aid ;
But sore distempers warrant desperate treat-
ment.

My loss of reputation hath unnerved
The will which should have been aroused to seek
A speedy remedy. (*He drinks.*) Ah ! that
is good !

I feel already that my sluggish blood
Begins to flow more freely through my veins.
What mortal, be he lustiest hero born,
Can headway make against the spirit world ?
When gods and spirits strive with me, my
prowess
Melts, as the snow recedes before the sun.
The Christian God hath fought for Valentinian.

(*Enter ADRIAN.*)

Adrian. Hail to thee, Attila !

Attila (*fiercely snatching up his javelin*). Dost
mock me, Adrian ?

Adrian. What mockery can lie within my words ?

Attila. All words of hope or joy insult the gloom
Now pressing on my breast. But thou art
welcome.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Permissioned agent of a fearful Deity,
Perchance thy counsels can relieve my heart.
To thy strange God I owe my late defeats.
Ere I fell foul of Christian priests and
prophets,
I penetrated far in hostile Gaul,
By subtle management more than by arms.
Although Theodoric, won by his craft,
Declared for *Ætius*, I made good alliance
With half the Franks, led by the elder son
Of Clodian, their late king. Town after town
Fell in my path, or opened wide its gates.
I crossed the Rhine, with glory passed the
Seine ;
I laid close siege to fortified Orleans,
That I might hold the passage of the Loire.
Was I not right therein ?

Adrian. The wise invader

Will ever seize dominion of the rivers
Which water the desired territory.

Attila. By such means did mine uncle, Rugilas,
Acquire the Eastern provinces of Rome.
He covered the great rivers, lesser offsprings
Of Danube's mighty waters, with his fleet,

GOD'S SCOURGE

A many long but slender barks, provided
By hollowed trunks of trees. Orleans was
mine,
For Sangiban, the Alani king within,
Had promised to bewray it in my hand.

Adrian. What saved Orleans?

Attila. Its bishop Anianus.

He prayed and cried aloud unto his God,
Till AEtius, marching fast to their relief,
Recruited with the Visigoths, appeared.
Shout after shout rang from the crowded
walls.

The bishop cried, "It is the aid of God!"

Adrian (*sighing*). Our Heavenly Father ever
shields His children,

When humbly they solicit His protection.

Attila. I then retired. Pursued, I crossed the
Seine,

And formed with careful judgment battle
order

Upon the spreading Catalaunian Fields,
Wherein my Scythian cavalry could find
Due space for rapid evolution.

I mapped it out with care : I in the centre,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Surrounded by my brave and faithful Huns,
The flower of Scythian warriors. On the left
I placed the Rugians, Heruli, Thuringians,
Also the Ostrogoths, and in command
Were brethren three, sons of an Ostrogothic
king.

Upon the right outspread Burgundians,
Gepidae,
And those Franks brought by Clodian's elder
son.

This right wing was commanded by brave
Ardaric,

The noble monarch of the Gepidae.

The nations from the Volga to the Danube,
Arranged in battle order on the plain,
Obeyed the word of Attila the Hun ;
And yet he failed.

Adrian. How managed crafty Aetius ?

Attila. The Alani king, whose more than doubtful faith

The Romans feared, was stationed in the
centre,
And duly watched. The massive Roman
troops,

GOD'S SCOURGE

And those Franks joined to *Ætius* by
Meroveus

(A son of Clodian) stretched out to the left,
Manceuvred by that gallant warrior, *Ætius*.
The right wing was made up of Visigoths,
Commanded by Theodoric, their king,
And two most gallant sons. O Adrian,
There lay the fault! I should have strained
all nerves

To stay alliance 'twixt those men and *Ætius*.
The broad and level plain showed but one
height,

Which Torismond, the young but wily
warrior,

Obtained his father's sanction to invest
With stalwart Visigoths, ere I could seize it.
This cast the fear of doubt upon my troops,
As it exalted Roman hopes of victory.

Adrian. This memorable battle of Châlons
Must have displayed strange features. All
the races,
Which people Europe from the Volga's banks
Across to Western Gaul, in crowds assembled
Upon the Catalaunian plain. The array

GOD'S SCOURGE

Suggests the aspect of a civil war.

Were not the kindred Goths ranged on both
sides ?

And did not Frankish brethren halve the
forces

Which should have fought in concert, side
by side ?

Too near similitude of arms and ensigns
Should not mark two opponents.

Attila (passionately). Oh, the joy,
The panting ecstasy of bloody warfare !
A conflict reigned, uncertain, terrible,
Beyond all parallel within the present
Or in the past. The morn is black with
arrows !

Advance, my trusty Scythians ; bend your
bows !

What archers equal you in strength of arm,
The accuracy of your aim ? A crash !

The infantry, the cavalry, they meet,

Retire to gain renewed velocity,

Then rush upon each other with fresh force.

Hail ! Hail to thee, O Mars, thou deity

Most prodigal of keen enjoyment's means !

GOD'S SCOURGE

The spouting blood intoxicates my warriors !
They fight like fiends ! On, on, ye gallant
souls !

Defeat is worse than death ! Life has no worth
Unsweetened by the victor's glory ! On !
The enemy's centre yields ! In treachery,
Or too hard pressed, the Alani turn and fly.
Fleet Mars, now urging on his chosen troops,
Drives back in dripping fear the Roman
legions.

Blood rolls in foaming billows o'er the plain !
O Scythians, strive, the day is ours ! Pursue !
Dispatch the fugitives ! Spare not a man !
Destruction be their lot ! Theodoric,
Essay not to uphold your yielding troops ;
You are too late. Well done, thou brave
Andages,

Most skilful Ostrogoth ; thy javelin
Hath pierced Theodoric, as he doth ride
Along his lines, encouraging all hearts.
He falls ! The agéd king is trampled down
Beneath the hoofs of his advancing cavalry.
Ye gallant Scythians, on ! The light wanes
fast ;

GOD'S SCOURGE

Approaching Night is spreading her thick veil ;
Let not the flying foe escape beneath it.

Confusion ! What is this ? The youthful
Torismond,

Who has maintained the height against all
efforts,

Now rushes down upon us, fierce enflamed
With hope of fame and eager thirst of ven-
geance.

Stay, cowards, stay ! My clotted sword cuts
down

The first who dares to turn ! Curse thee,
dead king !

I owe to thee this bitter, lasting shame.

Thine ardent son revives the quailing foe ;
The Invincible is vanquished by his means.

Sound a retreat, but let it be in order.

Woe, woe, that such a day should have such
ending !

Oh, gallant Torismond, hadst thou been mine,
Where now would be the crown of Valen-
tinian ?

Adrian (aside). This is no fitting time to press
my case.

GOD'S SCOURGE

(Aloud). Why so downcast? No thorough
victory

For your opponent could have left retreat
So open to you.

Attila. Sheltered by the night,
Withdrew I to my camp, fenced in with
waggons.

And there my coward captains, who had fled
At feeble Roman onslaught, felt the risks
Of braving Attila's contempt and rage.

(Significantly). A sudden death comes not
alone in battle,

But may be suffered in less glorious wise.

Adrian (aside). I shudder at his aspect!

Attila. Through the day
Incessantly my martial instruments
Rang out a fierce defiance of my foes.
The hunters feared so much the wounded
lion,
They dared not press close siege upon his den.
They vanishéd like mists as night crept on,
And like a fool I waited there, in fear
Lest the strange stillness meant some deeper
guile

GOD'S SCOURGE

To lure me on to ruin. I crossed the Rhine,
My swift retreat being harassed by Meroveus,
Whose Franks cut off the stragglers from my
ranks.

The haughty Frank, enjoying my black
shame,

Forgot I had to pass his own domains.

He knows it now. Rhine's heaving, swelling
breast

Proclaimed it harshly to him, cumberéd
With torn and mangled limbs of Frankish
maids,

Whose living bodies were detached and torn
By strongest Scythian horses, or were crushed
Beneath our waggon wheels.

Adrian (aside). O horror !

Attila. Adrian,

Thy God possesseth some most dreadful
power

Which bows all deities beneath His yoke.

'Twas He sent *Ætius* at one stroke to spoil
My labour of long weeks before Orleans.

And when, refreshed, I led my men to Rome,
To expiate my rankling fault in Gaul,

GOD'S SCOURGE

That aged saint, whom Christians call their
Father,

Did urge me to retire from Holy Italy,
On pain of awful penalties. In Rome
I dared not enter; a disturbing dream
Showed me two of your long-departed saints,
Who menaced me with instant, shameful
death

Should I, like Alaric, assail and ravage it.
I dared not linger there; your God's fierce
wrath

Was falling on us all. My soldiers sickened;
The hardy Scythian warriors drooped and sank
In Italy's too warm, deceitful clime.

Man thrives the best when fed on simple fare;
Compounded, artful diet steals the health
Which Nature's wholesome produce breeds
in him.

Adrian (absently). When interfering man puts in
his oar,

Wise Nature no more steers her bark
untrammelled.

Attila. Can you not ease my heavy-burdened
heart,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Suggest no spell to hold aloof from me
A warfare with the spirit world, in which
My spirit shrinks and faints ?

Adrian. Why not accept
The peace now offered you by Valentinian,
Concession sweetened by a splendid gift,
The so-called dower of Honoria ?
Seek some fresh field for conquest, where
the gods
Are of less might, or are far less protective.
Why not bear arms against proud, wealthy
Persia ?

Attila. But for one matter I would give consent.
Honoria shall be sent me as a wife.
I want her not, but mine own justest right
I will insist on. Either she comes hither,
Or I will in much greater force return.
(*VALENS and ILDICA pass at the back of the stage, outside the door, perceived by ATTILA and ADRIAN.*)

Adrian (aside). What mischief's impulse urged
them to pass by
At such a time, when smallest incidents
May choke or clear the river of their lives ?

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila (looking after ILDICA). Say, Adrian, hath
this lady's influence

Still power for good on mine o'erwhelmed
fate?

O truthful prophet, well thou didst foretell
Defeat. Now wilt thou tell me if her star
Sways still mine own.

Adrian (aside). Into what sea of troubles
Have I, false pilot, steered tempestuous
course?

This troubled head was not cast in a mould
To weave successful plots. A plan's fair circle
Should be unbroken; for the smallest chink
Can offer exits to those elements
Most necessary for success. Am I
The one to sketch it with exactitude?

Attila. Why should I not bind close her life with
mine

By means of wedlock? This fierce, bitter
gloom,
Which eats my heart, calls loud for conso-
lation.

Adrian (hastily). Nay, Attila, your project is
impossible.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila. And hath the Scythian monarch sunk so low
That actions hitherto as free as air
May now be checked, forbidden ? Adrian,
pause.

I reverence your power ; breed not distrust.
Suspicion creeps into the mind unfelt,
To trumpet forth its presence when provoked.
Is this maid aught to thee ?

Adrian. No, nothing, King.

What is a woman to a Christian recluse,
Vowed into penance and renunciation
While he hath life ?

Attila. A man makes not himself ;
And when the inner self cries out for hearing
Against his will he is impelled to expose it.

Adrian (*sinking his voice to a whisper*). Why
think about this lady, Attila,

When to your hand a weapon ready lies
Will render you invincible ?

Attila. Which weapon ?

(*VALENS and ILDICA repass at back of stage.*)

Adrian (*indicating VALENS*). Wrest from yon
youth the secret of the powder,
That magic powder that can level walls.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila. A happy thought ! To fight with fell
magicians

Requires magicians' aid. I will act now
On your suggestion.

(Exit hurriedly after VALENS.)

Adrian. Yet another step !

My forward - pressing foot sinks me more
deeply

In sin's dread quicksand. These foul words
of mine

Have dealt sure death to Valens. Yield he
will not

His dangerous secret to his country's foe ;

And Attila is plainly in no mood

To bear with trifling or a firm refusal.

I would not have his blood upon my head ;

Nor will I raise my hand to snuff the flame
Myself have kindled in this fuming king.

What if dead conscience should untimely
quicken,

And plunge me in the eddies of remorse ?

Remorse : an awful, tearing, gibing fiend ;

Her sharp, barbed fang is like an arrow's
head ;

GOD'S SCOURGE

Its fashion favours easy penetration,
Yet timely extrication must entail
A dreadful rending of the quivering flesh.
How soon does Guilt repent when sweet
Success,
The object sinned for, be attained? Perhaps
never?
Or not until the prize be owned so long
Satiety breeds weariness, disgust,
Cold feelings all the earlier aroused
When we have paid too dear. And what
cost equals
Destruction of our peace of mind. (*Looks
out.*) The King!
He bringeth hither Valens and Ildica!
Must I stay here, see what I've brought about,
The hapless youth stretched at my guilty feet?
For die he will, he must. What will she do?
O God, what will she do when he is slain?
I have called Valens "coward"; so he is;
But what am I who deal these backward
blows,
And dare not witness their entailed result?
(*Re-enter ATTILA, VALENS, and ILDICA.*)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila (*to Valens*). Weigh more your words;
such obstinate refusal
Grates on mine ears.

Valens. Can you call obstinate,
Resistance which decides to uphold honour
What ill betide?

Attila. I warn you, thwart me not.
Do my behest, or meet the consequence.

Ildica (*to Attila*). Recall the laws of hospitality,
Oh, injure not the guest within your lines!

Attila. Strain not the limit of forbearance. Woe
Hath drained what kindness happiness had
garnered
Within my breast. This heart is hard and dry;
And Attila alone decideth here
What must or may not be.

Valens. No aid I give
To mine own nation's detriment.

Attila (*drawing his sword*). Then perish!
If prudence doth not offer instant word
To soften your decision.

Ildica. Mercy, Attila!
Great Heaven defend him! Valens, tempt
him not!

GOD'S SCOURGE

Valens (*to ILDICA*). Unmanly craven that I am,
scarce can I

Stand up and face this furious king. Ildica !
My quailing spirit clings to thy support ;
Range not your argument upon his side.
Bethink thee, what will Valens be to thee,
His bowed front branded with a traitor's
name ?

Ildica. The loving reverence I hold for thee
Can never wane ; for are you not yourself,
The wisest, noblest being upon God's earth ?
Be true unto yourself.

Valens (*clasping her in his arms*). Then let thine
heart

Lend with its contact lacking strength to
mine.

Adrian (*aside to VALENS*). Thou coward, loose
Ildica from thy clasp,
And seek not shelter in a woman's arms.
Hot fury lights the eye of Attila ;
Release the maid at once, or she will share
Thy doom.

Valens. Stand back, Ildica (*releasing her*). (*To*
ATTILA). No, fierce king ;

GOD'S SCOURGE

I will not do your bidding. That sharp steel
Which rips this earthly casing is a friend,
Providing exit for the prisoned soul.
I fear not death ; I have too high belief
In better life hereafter.

(*ATTILA, furious, raises his sword to strike.*)

Ildica (crouching at the king's feet). Attila !

This is ignoble deed !

Adrian (aside). Shall I now speak,
And turn aside the king's blind, murderous
rage ?

Attila (to VALENS). Your spirit, cased within a
manly form,
Can it give tongue to sentiment so base,
Fit only for a helpless, ailing wretch,
Decayed by age or sickness, or for women ?
The strong man loves his life, will cling to it,
With all his force in spite of circumstances ;
For health brings with itself a keen enjoy-
ment,

Apart, distinct from life's experiences.

What joy it is to feel the bounding blood
Course through its channels when the sun
shines on us !

GOD'S SCOURGE

Valens. Yea, I have felt it; but such rampant life
Shrinks up and withers in the mourning out-
cast

Whose memory with cold insistence whispers
"Thou art dishonoured." Who can feel the
warmth,

The power of the sun when he is wrapped
In the impervious cloak of sombre Shame?

Attila (aside). I like him. I am loath to harm
this youth (*gazing down at ILDICA*).

Perchance a bribe may win where terror fails.
(*Aloud*). See, Valens, this fair maid bowed at
my feet;

Grant but my whim, and she is wholly yours.

Adrian (aside). If Valens should give way!

Valens. I cannot buy

My love at such a price.

Attila. The withered heart

Of spent existence coupled is in thee
With youth's fresh, outward form. Thou art
no man.

No words of thine shall turn my resolution.

Shall I let *Ætius* evermore rejoice

In my discomfiture? And do you think

GOD'S SCOURGE

I will allow you to recruit mine enemy
With that dread secret you withhold from me ?
(*Sternly*). Let it be mine, or, by my hearth !

it sinks

Into the silence of oblivion.

The hand of Death shall close your lips for aye,
Unless they open now. Moreover, youth,
You leave this maid a prey within my hands.
You say death brings release ? Perchance for
you ;

I know not what may lie beyond this life ;
But it will wrest from her an only safeguard.
'Twas for your sake I spared her. She shall pass
From your arms into mine.

Valens. Have pity, Heaven,
Upon my human frailty !

Adrian (aside). He yields !

No ! He stands firm. Should not I seek a
model

In his nobility ?

Attila (to VALENS). What is thine answer ?

Valens. My God ! heap not the heavy charge too
high !

Make some allowance for humanity !



GOD'S SCOURGE

Ildica (*extending her arms*). Dear Valens, reckon
not the cost of right.

Valens. But can I yield thee up to shame, mine
own,

Smirch thy fresh petals' whiteness, sweet,
pure lily,

Rend thy tall stem, and lay thee in the mire ?
Hath God decreed that my revering hand
Should help to blacken thy fair purity ?

Ildica. But you owe something to yourself, some-
thing

To memory which lives beyond the grave.
You leave me in God's charge.

Attila (*to VALENS*). Give me thine answer !

Valens. My God ! My God !

Adrian (*aside, desperately*). No horrid sights in
Hell

Can equal this. Yet I stand idly by
And raise no finger to avert the end.

Attila (*to VALENS*). Thine answer, boy !

Valens (*bowing his head*). Right, honour, equity,
Against my love and life !

Ildica (*passionately*). And men have sneered
And branded Valens "coward" !

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila. Is this wise ?

You give up all for senseless phantasy.

(*Raises his sword.*)

Ildica (clinging to ATTILA). Oh, sully not your sword, a warrior's sword !

Great Attila, true might scorns mean revenge.

(*ATTILA plunges his sword in VALENS' breast ; he falls.*)

Valens. O Lord ! protect the helpless and the innocent !

Farewell, Ildica !

Ildica (calmly and softly). For a little while,

Farewell, O my beloved companion,

Whose being is so close knit with mine own !

Existence cannot linger when its fount

Hath been choked up and quenched for evermore.

(*She gathers him in her arms.*)

Valens. Ay, that is right; Ildica, raise me up ;

My failing sight can reach thus thy sweet face,

My head thy gentle breast. How I do love thee !

And I must leave thee in such fearsome straits.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Ildica. I cast myself on God. Whence you now hasten

Despatch a speedy messenger for me.

(*VALENS dies.*)

Attila (*wiping his sword*). I was too hasty, I regret the stroke

Which hath destroyed a means of reparation.

Adrian (*gloomily*). The icy savage thinks but of the knowledge

He slew with Valens. His blood-glutted heart Is all unwounded by this piteous scene.

How still she is ! Oh, would that she but wept, Did anything but crouch there motionless !

Attila (*to ILDICA*). Fair lady, drop the senseless, breathless corse.

Those bloodless veins will never thrill again.

(*Turning away impatiently*). I have let anger spoil a smiling scheme,

But I must seek elsewhere, instead of wailing Lost opportunity. (*To ADRIAN*) Wise prophet, tell me,

Should I not now adopt my earlier plan ?

Adrian (*roughly*). Do as thou wilt ; my mind chimes not with plans ;

GOD'S SCOURGE

I drift upon the Sea of Circumstances,
To float or sink, as Providence may choose.

Attila (musingly, looking at ILDICA). Yes, I will
wed her, bind her ruling fate
Close to mine own, ere I essay once more
The total conquest of the Roman Empire.

(The stage darkens.)

Adrian (aside to ILDICA). . Collect yourself,
Ildica ; hear you not
That disposition is made of your life ?
Arise, attend, or I can aid you not.

Ildica (looking up at the darkening sky). I care
not what life hath in store for me,
As earthly pangs can no more pierce a heart
All numb and deadened by excessive pain.
Thank God ! a narrow grave doth finish all,
And must in time await me. Consolation,
The culmination of the Grace Divine,
Doth lie in that a welcome end must come.

(Bows her head on VALENS' body.)

A line exists beyond which human pain
Can never pass. Ah ! I have reached it now !
Despair's dark night is at its blackest hour ;

(Rises and raises her arms to Heaven.)
But added darkness doth precede the dawn !

GOD'S SCOURGE

SCENE II.—*Chamber in ATTILA's Palace.*

The board ceiling is supported by wooden pillars fluted and carved with some elegance. The floor is spread with rich carpets and skins. Large skins cover the couch. The carved tables and chairs are spoils from Greek and Roman cities. The door is of wood, heavily made, and strong.

(Enter ILDICA, CERCA, and female attendants.)

Cerca (to ILDICA). Fair Roman maid, the gloom,
the frozen calm,

Which mar your face but ill befit a bride.

You should be wreathed in smiles upon the day
Which gains for you a mighty hero's love,
And his all-powerful protection.

Ildica. What value hath protection which cannot
Protect the shrinking victim from a lot
More hateful to her than the vilest death?
Will he protect me from himself? That pride
Refinement breeds in men, who quite disdain
To force from women what they are loath to
grant,

Hath found no place within the heart of Attila.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Cerca. I cannot grasp the gist of such strange words.

A wife needs no protection from her spouse.
Think what an honour hath been vouchsafed
thee !

This king of men, galled by unknown defeat,
Seeks solace in thine arms.

Ildica (*sullenly*). And one man's honour
May prove another's burning shame, as haply
Each one may take it.

Cerca. Proud, contemptuous Roman,
Remember this self-same unmeasured pride
Hath been your nation's bane. What are
you, lady,
That you should scorn great Attila ?

Ildica. What am I ?

Oh, pitying God, what is this prostrate wretch,
Whose shaken mind now totters on the brink
Of Desperation's precipice ? Am I
That same Ildica, noble Priscus' daughter,
Who once lived in the joy of innocence
At dear Constantinople ?

Cerca. Bride less gracious
Hath it ne'er fallen to my lot to see.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Come, maidens, we will leave our Roman guest.

Not for your ears is such unnatural raving.
With Attila himself must she now deal;
He liketh not cold, sullen looks from women.

(Exeunt CERCA and maidens.)

Ildica. Barbarian that he is, no need to hint
What lies ahead for his most wretched wife.
The peevish temper of a child in him
Is bound up in the body of a man.
Sweet Valens, who, that hath been loved by
thee,
Could bear the contact of this savage Hun?
Yet habit ever fosters resignation.
How low may I not sink? Man knoweth not
What depths or heights his nature can attain,
Till forced by circumstances forth to leap
And meet what wayward Fortune wills to
him.
As sore Misfortune's shocks but shake and
spoil,
And rarely lacerate to danger's pitch,
Perchance Ildica, as the years flow on,
May grow to fawn upon her savage captor

GOD'S SCOURGE

For smile or touch she loathes to think on now ?
Oh no, no ! Let me not so basely sink
Into the ductile slave of a barbarian.
Lord, let me keep my reason and respect ;
Let me partake of Valens' bloody grave ;
Lest, soiled by shameful treatment, I become
The merest animal, a beast of burden,
A creature for the vilest uses, heartless,
And soulless, mindless, too contemptible
To even tempt the Devil's snares for Hell !
(*Looks round her*). Can I find no means to
escape such fate,
To leave this fearful place ? Should none
befriend me,
No kindly, helping hand promote my flight,
I can but die in the free wilderness,
An object still for my Redeemer's grace.
What Hun will dare arrest the wife of Attila ?
(*In great terror*). Who comes there ? Is it
Attila ? What ! Adrian !

(*Enter ADRIAN.*)

Adrian. I came, Ildica, to ward off a lot
Suits not your gently-nurtured self. A word,
A sign from me, and you escape. This King,

GOD'S SCOURGE

A slave to superstition, will abstain,
If one, whose word he trusts, points out some
harm

Resulting to himself or to his people.

Ildica (*eagerly*). Good Adrian, thou wilt surely
give the sign ?

What harm I've wrought thee hath not been
of will.

I ask not aid to seek a road to joy ;
I have no wish to live ; I fain would die
Upon that narrow strip of Dacian land
Where Valens' self is laid. Ah me ! Ah me !
But this life is not mine to take, nor selfishly
May I ignore quite other claims to those
Which Valens wielded in my stricken heart.
In far-off Thrace I have a mourning sire,
Who wails his only daughter's hapless fate,
Yet cannot stir for her deliverance.

Good Priscus, in a time of heavy stress,
Held out to thee the hand of amity,
The firm, close clasp of which ensured protection
E'en at his own most deadly risk and peril.
Repay his needed generosity,.
And save his helpless daughter !

GOD'S SCOURGE

Adrian (aside). Once again

An outlet from my guilty course is oped.

Shall I avail myself of that God gives ?

Ildica. Will you assist me, or have you exposed

A means of safety to increase my pain ?

Adrian (aside). Hope's blessed consolation might
be mine ;

Unsearéd conscience is its only source.

In my right hand I hold the fateful balance ;

Shall good or evil turn the scale ?

Ildica. O Adrian,

Inexorable Time doth march apace,

With red Shame following closely in his foot-
prints.

Bestir your thoughts ; you let this ill pair gain
Fast on the laggard steps of your decision.

Adrian. Beyond all words I love thee, sweet
Ildica ;

Thou art the very marrow of my bones !

'Twas in my mind but now to simulate,

And tender thee false safety to remove thee

From Attila's firm grasp into mine own.

But I will leave it to your soul's debate.

Wilt thou cleave to me or to Attila ?

GOD'S SCOURGE

The one or other of us is the fate
From which no power on earth can free thee
now.

Thou shalt not go hence to thy father's house,
To live in peace while I lie perishing.

Ildica. Your nature, overtaxed, is out of tune,
And sounds but jarring discords. All your views
Concerning life and duty are perverted.
Yet think ; what benefit could you extract
From that unhappy being you seek to draw
To your disturbéd level ?

Adrian. Peace would come.

The youth who loved thee lies in his new
grave ;
No craving for him e'er will bring him back ;
His presence, therefore, cannot stand between
us.

Ildica (weeping). It lives with me.

Adrian. You are the wife of Attila.

My power with him is such that as a spirit
I could impel him ever to respect you.
If you doubt my ability, but speak,
And I will slay him as he entereth. (*Draws
a dagger from his breast.*)

GOD'S SCOURGE

Ildica (gazing at him fixedly and drawing back).

Art thou a man indeed, or fiend incarnate ?

Hate near a lifetime's prayers brought thee
to be

Mere selfish brute, consulting his own ends
At risk of all who know him ?

Adrian. Choose between us !

Ildica. Though Attila may be a rude barbarian,
He acts according to his lights. To him
Falls the award for virtue, honesty.

(Passionately). Base traitor that you are !
Your sole excuse,

The canker in your mind, is rendered void
By your base craft in sordid argument.

Adrian (aside). Her answers' calculation likes me
not.

Strenuous resistance savours more of yielding
Than firm evasion. I have missed my time.
I should have tempted her in the despair,
The cold uncaring calm the new-born day
Saw grow from frenzied fear. I have been
too slow ;

Or else not slow enough.

Ildica. Go, traitor, go !

GOD'S SCOURGE

On helpless captive wrong wrought by the
captor

No sin of hers will count. The soiled body
Will be no mirror of the struggling soul.
But if I go with thee to flee one wrong,
I enter consciously into another,
And smirch my spirit even as my frame.

Adrian (raging). I choke with curses on that
doting father,

Who trained his child in his philosophy,
And bred cold reason in her ductile mind
To overcome a woman's inborn fear !

(To Ildica). Exist then, as thine obstinacy
favours.

Thy life or death no gleam shall raise in me
Of interest or sorrow. I fling off,
As I reject this bit of glancing steel (*hurls
away the dagger*),

The very shadow of thy life from mine !

(Exit.)

Ildica. If man's help be denied me, I retain
A higher, mightier aid. Why, what is this ?
(Treads on the dagger.)

A gift laid at my feet by God Himself,

GOD'S SCOURGE

A means of sure escape from degradation,
A magic transport, which in one great bound
Can traverse the vast space between two
worlds !

O blessed, priceless gift ! Thy sharp, bright
point

Can lay bare possibilities beyond
What Grecian sages dreamed of. Nestle there,
(*Puts the dagger in her breast.*)

For happy use when needed. Thy chill touch
Restores the warmth despair had near destroyed.

(*Enter ATTILA.*)

Attila. Shrink not, Ildica ; wherefore still persist
In that retiring modesty, chief grace
Of timid maiden, yet but little soothing
To husband in a wife ?

Ildica. No wife am I,
But wretched Roman captive—

Attila. —And my slave,
Who hath been raised to honour far too high,
To be a wife of Attila the king,
Chief wife of all save Cerca, who, my fair one,
I cannot bend for thee. She is the mother
Of Ernac, best beloved of all my sons,

GOD'S SCOURGE

Who, augurs have declared, alone is destined
To uphold the glory of his father's realm.

Ildica. I envy not good Cerca's proud position.

O king, I would not grudge my humble
strength

For any menial labour you could deal;

(*Hides her face*). Enforce not on me that yet
lower use

A friendless, imprisoned woman needs must bear
At captor's will.

Attila (fiercely). Is this an intimation
That union with the monarch of the Huns
Degrades a Roman lady? Have a care!
For short forgetfulness I sought thy love.
Am I to encounter looks of cold dislike,
A face disdainful, so deprived of smiles,
It shows far worse than frowns? The
irritation
Brought by a sense of failure needs no goad
To anger's madness 'gainst that peevish being
Who, discontented, lends her puling wail
To top a monarch's miseries.

Ildica (aside). To me

How far more grateful is his furious rage!

GOD'S SCOURGE

The dangerous flicker in his savage eye
Is welcome sight.

Attila (gently, seating himself). Come hither,
sweet Ildica.

Ildica. Nay ; keep your place ! Barbarian, touch
me not !

(*ATTILA rises and comes towards her.*)

O kindly Heaven, defend me from this man !

Attila (seizing her roughly). Call not upon your
God against your master,
Or I will take sure means to stay your cries.
I need your intercession, not your curse.

Ildica. O Valens, Valens !

Attila (falling back). Syria's magician !

His knowledge but for my too hasty stroke
Would have enabled me to scale my woes,
Without resorting to this peevish maid.

(*To ILDICA*). Thou soul preserve, thine every
word and look
Arouses in my soul a furious fiend,
Who slumbers not again till slaked with
blood.

Ildica. May surging rage impel this man to
slay me !

GOD'S SCOURGE

Attila. Thou art too precious to give up to Death;
I lose not second source of hope through
haste.

Ildica (*drawing the dagger*). I find protection in
this last resource.

Attila (*seizing her*). Thou shalt not thwart my
fortunes thus! Confusion!

(*A struggle ensues, in which the dagger is
thrust forward into ATTILA'S breast.*
He releases ILDICA and staggers back.)

Hath woman's stroke dealt death to Attila?

Ildica. What have I done? Imbued this hand
with blood?

By cruel chance I am a murderer!

Not mine, another's soul have I despatched!

Attila. True daughter of the treacherous Roman
brood,

Your steel performs the purpose of Vigilius,
And frees your trembling nation from her
Scourge.

Ildica. Not treacherous, great king; not treach-
erous;

No thought of treachery dwelt in my breast;
The dagger's point was turned against myself.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Let me assist thee, close this deep, broad
gash,

And staunch the rushing blood. I truly
grieve

That I have injured thee : Ildica's hand
Hath hitherto wrought harm to none.

*(She supports him and attempts to staunch
the wound.)*

Attila. Poor lady !

I fear me much thy life will be the price
Demanded for the death of Attila.

My youthful son, whose growth I hoped to
train,

Can never keep the frenzied hordes in check,
When they cry vengeance on thee. I
repent me

I did withhold thee from thy noble sire,
That manly Priscus, who, most worthily,
Upholds the name of Roman. Gloomy
Adrian,

The anchorite of Syria, lied to me,
And should embrace the fate the ancient
Scythians

Decreed to their false prophets by their laws.

GOD'S SCOURGE

No safeguard was thy presence to ensure
The flight of fell misfortune ; for, alas !
Calamities have showered thick upon me,
Since thou hast sojourned with me. O my
people,
Much fear I will your king's death mean
for you !

The Roman star will rise and yours will set.
My sons, my subject kings know not the art
Of combination. Ernac, my young boy,
Alone gives promise of a head to organise
As well as arm to win.

(He falls to the ground.)

Ildica. Shall I seek aid ?

Your wound demands attendance my poor
skill

Cannot afford.

Attila. No need ; my life is spent—

(half rising). Great God of War, preserve a
warrior's name

Within Posterity's long-lived remembrance !

(ATTILA dies.)

Ildica (gazing straight before her). Religion in no
wise is the creed

GOD'S SCOURGE

Which man receiveth of his father's teaching;
But rather is it innate principle,
Born in the heart, found by the groping
brain

Of every thinking being, each for himself.

His choice of God forms not man's better
parts

(Though it may have due influence and
weight) ;

The great man is of all creeds, nations, times,
And side by side with him will e'er be found
His vicious antitype, mean, low, depraved.

This heathen king, barbarian as he was,

(Looks at ATTILA'S corpse.)

Yet had religion set so strongly in his heart,
He reached a higher, firmer pedestal
Than Christian Roman of his age can boast.
His vices were those of his age and nation ;
His noble qualities were all his own.

To do one's best, inspired by one's belief,
Should this not be the sole aim of mankind ?
Yet I have shown myself without the faith,
By which this heathen monarch hath pre-
vailea.

GOD'S SCOURGE

(She sits in mourning attitude by the corpse, closely wrapped in her veil. Loud murmurs are heard without, increasing to a tumult.)

Edecon (without). What means this bloody trail which licks the dust,
Enrolling it to form small, moving spheres
Within its languid course ? Is aught amiss ?
Its source is in the chamber of the king !
Hath harm befallen Attila, the lady ? . . .
O Attila, thy servant calls ; arise !
The camp is in a ferment ; show thyself,
And prove thyself unharmed !

Orestes (without). Rise, Attila !

Scythians (without). Oh, Attila, great Attila, arise !
Proclaim thyself unharmed !

Ildica (heavily). Ay, call aloud !

Your monarch sleeps a sleep so fast and deep
No human voice will ever rouse him more.

Orestes (without). There's mischief here. O,
warriors, force an entry !

Break down the sullen barrier of the door !

(Blows given without on the door, which strains and bends. ILDICA sits motion-

GOD'S SCOURGE

less. The door falls. Re-enter ADRIAN ; enter EDECON, ORESTES, and Scythians.)

Adrian (frantically). What woful sight is this ?
O sweet Ildica !

To what dread pass have I enticed thy steps !
Orestes. The king is slain, and by a woman's hand !
Scythians. Death to the traitress ! Rend her limb
from limb !

Edecon (to ILDICA). Thy foul stroke hurls an
Empire in the dust !

Ildica (raising her arms to Heaven). Dear Lord,
I turn to Thee for pitying grace.
As forfeit freely do I yield my life.
The fateful stroke fulfilled not its intent,
But it was turned against a human heart ;
And Thou hast well decreed the vital spark
Be lit or snuffed alone by Thy dread Hand.

Edecon. Foul traitress, take from me your meet
reward !

(Stabs her. ADRIAN rushes madly forward.)
Ildica (bowing her head). 'Tis easier to receive
than give a stroke . . .

My father, little deemed you that your child

GOD'S SCOURGE

Would end existence in such wise and place.
The current of events hath been too strong
For me to breast it. I have failed in faith ;
I fitly pay the penalty incurred. (Dies.)

Adrian (furiously). Ten thousand devils rend
this blasted soul

In lowest depths of Hell ! 'Twas I alone
Who forged the artful links of this foul
chain,

And riveted its grievous length together.

(To ILDICA'S body). Sweet victim of my
frenzy's crushing rage,

Thy living presence conjured up its fury ;
Thy death doth but increase it !

(Flings himself upon the body of ILDICA.)

Edecon. Let us not,

O warriors, fling abroad the shameful truth
That this great monarch met his doleful
death,

Not on the field of battle, aptly stained
With blood of fleeing foes, but sadly
drenched

In his own sacred gore, demolished
By base assassin's feeble stealthy hand.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Orestes. The king hath been much subject of late
years

To great excess of blood when gorged with
food.

Why not give out that undue flow of blood,
Resulting on his hearty marriage feast,
Crept in his brain and slew him in his
sleep ?

Edecon. A timely thought is this of thine, Orestes,
Which we will henceforth circulate. To-
night

Perform we solemnly the obsequies
Of him whose name will fly on eagles' pens
Throughout the world in every age. His
fame

Is all a hero cares to leave behind.

This corpse, the wrapping of that kingly
soul,

For ever hide we it from mortal eye.

Let no man in the future point, and say,
"This is the tomb of Attila." A hero,
As once dwelt in this form, can never die.
Then why point out the tomb of one alive ?
A place of sepulture we will appoint.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Let slaves alone remove the earth therein ;
Then slay we all of them to the last man,
And heap their bodies round about the
king,

Fit hecatomb to him who lived on war.
The leading few will shovel in what earth
The loaded grave can bear. E'er in their
hearts

Will lie the secret of his resting-place.

Orestes. Where shall be laid the beauteous Roman
maid ?

Poor lady ! Fate hath dealt but hardly with
her.

Edecon (furiously). Fling forth her body for the
kites and vultures,

The wolves and every beast of prey to tear !
No shielding ground protect it from their
rage !

Let teeth and claws unhindered do their
work !

Wail of Hunnish women without. Woe !

Woe ! Oh bitter, lasting woe !

The king hath fallen, the great bowed low !

Orestes. The news has spread ; the women wail.

GOD'S SCOURGE

Edecon (*sternly*). The men

Bewail their endless loss with tears of blood
Dropped from the gaping wounds their
knives inflict,

To engender other tears than those of women.

(*The Scythians prepare to remove ATTILA's body.*)

Adrian (*aside*). No beast or bird shall touch that
spotless flesh.

My hands shall lay her in a seemly grave,
(*Rising on his elbow to watch the Scythians.*)

Ere I go forth to climb the loftiest shaft
Deserted ruins provide me, there to wither
And expiate in cruel exposure's grasp

The evil I have wrought. (To ILDICA's
body.) Fair, gracious creature,

Thou art not dead ! Thou wilt lift up thine
eyes,

And bless me with a glance ? (Starts to his
feet.) Accurséd World !

The surging waters of thy forced afflictions
For aye have washed me from the Happy
Shore.

With furious blasphemy my shaking lip

GOD'S SCOURGE

Denounceth Fate's most pitiless decrees.
The pressure of existence when 'tis strained
Is far beyond the strength of man to bear.
Thou hast no call, O God, to impose such
 pain
And crush Thy hapless minions of the earth.
Grief, raging, tears my heart-strings, urging
 me,
To curse and blaspheme, wreak some fearful
 evil,
To avenge the miseries unduly dealt me.
And I must lie here like a log and bear
 them !
I will not, nay, I cannot ! Cold endurance
At length hath sunk submerged beneath the
 waves
Of chafed expostulation. (*Rages about the stage.*) I'll not bear it !
O Satan, help me, at what price thou wilt,
To raise myself above this subject state,
Above this consciousness of impotence !
Shall I crouch, bow to the inevitable,
When Misery's rough hand with cold in-
 difference

GOD'S SCOURGE

Hath stirred the muddy dregs of agony,
Strewed by its Maker in the heart's fair well,
To soil and cloud it at His haughty Will ?
'Tis too much to expect of any man.
A man ! Poor wretch ! What use to be a
man,
A mean and crawling worm, a shuttlecock,
Tossed on the battledores of sportive Fates,
Too low for good, too feeble for real evil ?—
(*More calmly*). At least a devil is not
impotent,
The merest toy of idle Destiny.
Humanity, I scorn your piteous patience
Beneath imposed pain ! You can escape ;
The Lord and Satan stand at either hand ;
It is for you, blind fools, to look and choose.
Why quail to join the mighty ranks of those
Whose sufferings are far less than your own,
Assuaged as they must be by sense of power
To avenge on others what they undergo ?—
(*Raging again.*) I loathe the passive part
which man doth hold !
Nor will I further bear its ignominy.
I cast aside allegiance to my Maker,

GOD'S SCOURGE

And hail thee, Satan, as my lord and master.
Worthy recruit within thy mighty legions,
I seek a share of thine immunity,
And claim a refuge in the vaults of Hell !

*(Falls in a fit on the ground. Exeunt
ORESTES, EDECON, and Scythians with
the body of ATTILA. Funeral march
played, forming an accompaniment to the
women's dirge. Enter slowly veiled
Scythian women.)*

Scythian women (singing). Woe to the nations
disconsolate,
Of head and central force bereft !
Component parts, the bond once cleft,
Hostile arrays will soon dissipate.

END OF ACT IV.

(CURTAIN.)

